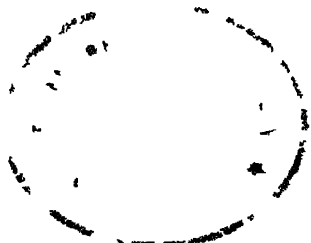
Selected Stories of

Alphonse Daudet

With Illustrations by Jacob Getlar Smith



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The Curé of Cucugnan

EVERY YEAR at Candlemas the Provençal poets publish at Avignon a jovial little book full to the brim of merry tales and pretty verses. That of this year has just reached me, and in it I find an adorable *fabliau* which I shall try to translate for you, slightly abridging it. Parisians! hold out your sacks. It is the fine flour of the Provençal harvest that I serve you this day.

The Abbé Martin was curé of Cucugnan.

Good as bread, honest as gold, he loved his Cucugnanese paternally. To him, Cucugnan would have been heaven upon earth if the Cucugnanese had given him a little more satisfaction. But alas! the spiders spun their webs in h s confessional, and on the glorious Easter-day the Host remained in the holy pyx. This harrowed the heart of the worthy priest, and he was always asking God to grant that he might not die until he had brought back to the fol l his scattered flock.

Now you shall see how God listened to him.

One Sunday, after the Gospel, M. Martin went up into the pulpit.

"Brethren," he said, "you may believe me if you like: the other night I found myself, I, a miserable sinner, at the gates of Paradise.

"I rapped; Saint Peter came.

" 'Bless me! is it you, my worthy Monsieur Martin?' he said to me. 'What good wind has brought you? What can I do for you?'

" 'Great Saint Peter, you who hold the big book and the keys, would you tell me, if I am not too curious, how many Cucugnanese you have in Paradise?'

" 'I can't refuse you anything, Monsieur Martin; sit down; we will look the thing out together.'

"And Saint Peter got out his big book, opened it, and put on his spectacles.

" 'Let me see: Cucugnan, did you say? Cu . . . Cu . . . Cucugnan. Here we are, Cucugnan. . . My dear Monsieur Martin, it is a blank page. Not a soul. . . No more Cucugnanese in Paradise than fishbones in a turkey.'

" 'What! No one from Cucugnan here? No one? It isn't possible! Do look again.'

" 'No one, holy man. Look yourself if you think I am joking.'

" 'I, *pécaïre!*' I stamped my feet and I cried for mercy with clasped hands. Whereupon Saint Peter said:—

" 'Monsieur Martin, you must not turn your heart inside out in this way, or you'll have a fit of some kind. It isn't your fault, after all.

Those Cucugnanese of yours, don't you see, they'll have to do their quarantine in purgatory.'

"'Oh! for pity's sake, great Saint Peter, let me just go to purgatory for a minute to see them and comfort them.'

"'Willingly, my friend... Here, put on these sandals, for the roads are none too good. That's right. Now go straight before you. Don't you see a turning a long way down? There you'll find a silver door all studded with black crosses—on your right. Knock, and they'll open to you. Adieu! Keep well and lively.'

"Down I went—down, down! What a struggle! My flesh creeps for only thinking of it. A narrow path, full of briers and big shiny beetles and snakes hissing, brought me to the silver door.

"Pan! pan!

"'Who knocks?' said a hoarse and dismal voice.

"'The curé of Cucugnan.'

"'Of—?'

"'Of Cucugnan.'

"'Ah!... Come in.'

"I went in. A tall, handsome angel with wings black as night and a garment resplendent as day, and a diamond key hanging to his belt, was writing, cra-cra, in a big book—bigger than that of Saint Peter.

"'Now then, what do you want?' asked the angel.

"'Noble angel of God, I want to know—perhaps you'll think me

very inquisitive—whether my Cucugnanese are here.'

"'Your —?'

"'Cucugnanese, the inhabitants of Cucugnan. I am their prior.'

"'Ah, yes! the Abbé Martin, isn't it?'

"'At your service, Monsieur Angel.'

"'You say Cucugnan —"

"And the angel opened his big book, wetting his finger with his spittle to turn the leaves easily.

"'Cucugnan,' he said, with a heavy sigh. 'Monsieur Martin, we haven't a soul in purgatory from Cucugnan.'

"'Jesu! Marie! Joseph! not a soul from Cucugnan in purgatory! Then, great God! where are they?'

"'Eh! holy man! they are in paradise. Where the deuce do you suppose they are?'

"'But I have just come from there, from paradise.'

"'You have come from there! Well?'

"'They are not there! . . . Ah! merciful mother of angels! . . .'

"'But, holy man, if they are not in paradise and not in purgatory, there is no middle place, they are in —'

"'Holy Cross! Jesus, son of David! Aië! aië! aië! it isn't possible? Can it be that the great Saint Peter lied to me? I didn't hear a cock crow. . . Aië! poor people! and poor me! for how can I go to paradise if my Cucugnanese are not there?'

"'Listen to me, my poor Monsieur Martin. As you want to be so



sure about this thing, cost what it may, and to see with your own eyes what there is to it, take this path and run fast, if you know how to run. You will come to a great big portal on your left. There you can find out everything. God grants it.'

"And the angel shut his gate.

"'T was a long path, paved all the way with red embers. I tottered as if I were drunk; at every step I stumbled; I was bathed in perspiration; every hair of my body had its drop of sweat; I panted with thirst. But thanks to the sandals that good Saint Peter lent me, I did not burn my feet.

"After I had made many a limping misstep I saw at my left hand a gate--no, a portal, an enormous portal, gaping wide open, like the door of a big oven. O! my children, what a sight! *There,* no one asked my name; *there,* no register. In batches, in crowds, people entered, just as you, my brethren, go to the wineshops on Sunday

"I sweated great drops, and yet I was chilled to the bone and shuddering. My hair stood erect. I smelt burning, roasting flesh, something like the smell that fills all Cucugnan when Eloy the blacksmith burns the hoof of an old donkey as he shoes her. I lost my breath in that stinking, fiery air; I heard an awful clamor, moans, howls, oaths.

"'Well! are you, or are you *not* coming in, you?' said a hornèd demon, pricking me with his pitchfork.

"'I? I don't go in there. I am a friend of God.'

"'A friend of God! Hey! you scabby rascal! what are you doing here?'

"'I have come—ah! I can't talk of it, my legs are giving way under me. I have come –I have come a long way—to humbly ask you—if—if by chance—you have here—some one—some one from Cucugnan—'

"'Ha! fire of God! you are playing stupid, are you? Just as if you didn't know that all Cucugnan is here. There, you ugly crow, look there, and see how we treat 'em here, your precious Cucugnanese—'

"I looked, and saw, in the midst of awful, whirling flames,—

"That long Coq-Galine,—you all knew him, my brethren,—Coq-Galine, who got drunk so often and shook his fleas on his poor Clairette.

"I saw Catarinet—that little slut with her nose in the air—who slept alone in the barn—you remember, you rascals? But that's enough—enough said.

"I saw Pascal Doigt-de-Pois who made his oil of M. Julien's olives.

"I saw Babette the gleaner, who, when she gleaned, grabbed handfuls from the sheaves to fill her bundle.

"I saw Maître Grabasi, who oiled the wheel of his barrow so slick;

"And Dauphine, who sold the water of his well so dear;

"And Tortillard, who, when he met me carrying the Good God, kept on his way as if he had only met a dog,—pipe in his mouth, cap on his head, proud as Artaban.

"And I saw Coulau with his Zette, and Jacques, and Pierre, and Toni..."

Livid with fear, the audience groaned, beholding, through the opened gates of hell, this one his father, that one her mother, some their grandmothers, some their brothers and sisters.

"You feel now, my brethren," said the good abbé, "that this must not go on any longer. I have the charge of souls, and I wish to save you, I *will* save you, from the abyss to which you are all rolling head-foremost. To morrow I shall set to work—no later than to-morrow. And I shall have my hands full. This is what I shall do. In order to do it well, it must be done methodically. We will go row by row, as at Jonquières when you dance.

"To-morrow, Monday. I shall confess the old men and the old women. That's nothing.

"Tuesday, the children. Soon done.

"Wednesday, the lads and lasses. May take long.

"Thursday, the men. Cut them short.

"Friday, the women. I shall say: No rigmaroles.

"Saturday, the miller! One whole day is not too much for him alone.

"And Sunday it will all be done and we shall be happy.

"You know, my children, that when the wheat is ripe it must be cut; when the wine is drawn it must be drunk. Here's a lot of dirty linen to wash, and it must be washed, and well washed.

"That is the good I wish you. Amen."

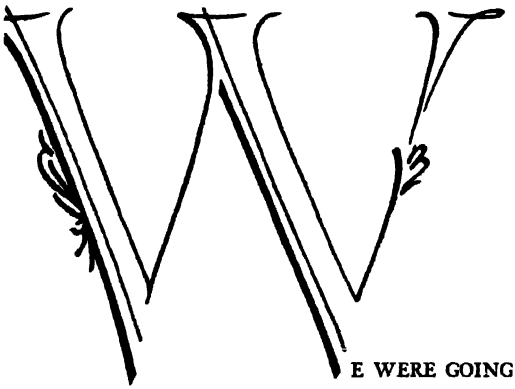
What was said was done. The wash came off. And since that memorable Sunday the fragrance of the virtues of Cucugnan can be smelt in an area of ten leagues round.

And the good pastor, M. Martin, happy and gay, dreamed the other night that, followed by his whole flock, he mounted, in resplendent procession, amid gleaming torches, and clouds of incense wafted by the choirboys chanting the Te Deum, the great lighted road to the City of our God.

Now there's the tale of the curé of Cucugnan, such as that great rascal Roumanille ordered me to tell it to you; he himself having got it from some other good fellow.



The Siege of Berlin



E WERE GOING up the Champs Elysées with Doctor V——, gathering from the walls pierced by shell, the pavement ploughed by grape-shot, the history of besieged Paris, when just before reaching the Place de l'Etoile, the doctor stopped and pointed out to me one of those large corner houses, so pompously grouped around the Arc de Triomphe.

"Do you see," said he, "those four closed windows on the balcony up there? In the beginning of August, that terrible month of August of '70, so laden with storm and disaster, I was summoned there to attend a case of apoplexy. The sufferer was Colonel Jouve, an old Cuirassier of the First Empire, full of enthusiam for glory and patriotism, who, at the commencement of the war, had taken an apartment with a balcony in the Champs Elysées—for what do you think? To witness the triumphal entry of our troops! Poor old man! The news of Wissembourg arrived as he was rising from table. On reading the name of Napoleon at the foot of that bulletin of defeat he fell senseless!

"I found the old Cuirassier stretched upon the floor, his face bleed-

ing and inert as from the blow of a club. Standing, he would have been very tall; lying down he looked immense, with fine features, beautiful teeth, and white curling hair, carrying his eighty years as though they had been sixty. Beside him knelt his granddaughter in tears. She resembled him. Seeing them side by side, they reminded me of two Greek medallions stamped with the same impress, only the one was antique, earth-stained, its outlines somewhat worn; the other beautiful and clear, in all the lustre of freshness.

"The child's sorrow touched me. Daughter and granddaughter of soldiers, for her father was on MacMahon's staff, the sight of this old man stretched before her evoked in her mind another vision no less terrible. I did my best to reassure her, though in reality I had but little hope. We had to contend with hæmoptysis, from which at eighty there is small chance of recovery.

"For three days the patient remained in the same condition of immobility and stupor. Meanwhile came the news of Reichshofen—you remember how strangely? Till the evening we all believed in a great victory—20,000 Prussians killed, the Crown Prince prisoner.

"I cannot tell by what miracle by what magnetic current, an echo of this national joy can have reached our poor invalid, hitherto deaf to all around him; but that evening, on approaching the bed, I found a new man. His eye was almost clear, his speech less difficult, and he had the strength to smile and to stammer:

"'Victory, victory!'

"'Yes, Colonel, a great victory.' And as I gave the details of MacMahon's splendid success I saw his features relax and his countenance brighten.

"When I went out his granddaughter was waiting for me, pale and sobbing.

"'But he is saved,' said I, taking her hands.

"The poor child had hardly courage to answer me. The true Reichshofen had just been announced, MacMahon a fugitive, the whole army crushed. We looked at each other in consternation, she anxious at the thought of her father, I, trembling for the grandfather. Certainly he would not bear this new shock. And yet what could we do? Let him enjoy the illusion which had revived him? But then we should have to deceive him.

"'Well then, I will deceive him!' said the brave girl, and hastily wiping away her tears she re-entered her grandfather's room with a beaming face.

"It was a hard task she had set herself. For the first few days it was comparatively easy, as the old man's head was weak, and he was as credulous as a child. But with returning health came clearer ideas. It was necessary to keep him *au courant* with the movements of the army and to invent military bulletins. It was pitiful to see that beautiful girl bending night and day over her map of Germany, marking it with little flags, forcing herself to combine the whole of a glorious campaign—Bazaine on the road to Berlin, Frossard in Bavaria, MacMahon on the Baltic. In

all this she asked my counsel, and I helped her as far as I could, but it was the grandfather who did the most for us in this imaginary invasion. He had conquered Germany so often during the First Empire! He knew all the moves beforehand: 'Now they should go there. This is what they will do,' and his anticipations were always realized, not a little to his pride. Unfortunately, we might take towns and gain battles, but we never went fast enough for the Colonel. He was insatiable. Every day I was greeted with a fresh feat of arms:

"'Doctor, we have taken Mayence,' said the young girl, coming to meet me with a heart-rending smile, and through the door I heard a joyous voice crying:

"'We are getting on, we are getting on! In a week we shall enter Berlin!

"At that moment the Prussians were but a week from Paris. At first we thought it might be better to move to the provinces, but once out of doors, the state of the country would have told him all, and I thought him still too weak, too enervated, to know the truth. It was therefore decided that they should stay where they were.

"On the first day of the investment I went to see my patient—much agitated, I remember, and with that pang in my heart which we all felt at knowing that the gates of Paris were shut, that the war was under our walls, that our suburbs had become our frontiers.

"I found the old man jubilant and proud.

"'Well,' said he, 'the siege has begun!'

"I looked at him stupefied.

"'How, Colonel, you know?'

"His granddaughter turned to me, 'Oh yes, Doctor, it is great news. The siege of Berlin has commenced.'

"She said this composedly, while drawing out her needle. How could he suspect anything? He could not hear the cannon nor see that unhappy Paris, so sullen and disorderly. All that he saw from his bed was calculated to keep up his delusion. Outside was the Arc de Triomphe, and in the room quite a collection of souvenirs of the First Empire. Portraits of marshals, engravings of battles, the King of Rome in his baby-robes; the stiff consoles, ornamented with trophies in brass, were covered with Imperial relics, medals, bronzes; a stone from St. Helena under a glass shade; miniatures all representing the same be-curled lady, in ball-dress, in a yellow gown with leg-of-mutton sleeves and light eyes; and all—the consoles, the King of Rome, the medals, the yellow ladies with short waists and sashes under their arms in that style of awkward stiffness which was the grace of 1806.—Good Colonel! it was this atmosphere of victory and conquest, rather than all we could say, which made him believe so naïvely in the siege of Berlin.

"From that day our military operations became much simpler. Taking Berlin was merely a matter of patience. Every now and then, when the old man was tired of waiting, a letter from his son was read to him—an imaginary letter of course, as nothing could enter Paris, and as, since Sedan, MacMahon's aide-de-camp had been sent to a German fortress.



Can you not imagine the despair of the poor girl, without tidings of her father, knowing him to be a prisoner, deprived of all comforts, perhaps ill, and yet obliged to make him speak in cheerful letters, somewhat short, as from a soldier in the field, always advancing in a conquered country. Sometimes, when the invalid was weaker than usual, weeks passed without fresh news. But was he anxious and unable to sleep, suddenly a letter arrived from Germany which she read gaily at his bedside, struggling hard with her tears. The Colonel listened religiously, smiling with an air of superiority, approving, criticizing, explaining; but it was in the answers to his son that he was at his best. 'Never forget that you are a Frenchman,' he wrote; 'be generous to those poor people. Do not make the invasion too hard for them.' His advice was never ending: edifying sermons about respect of property, the politeness due to ladies, in short quite a code of military honor for the use of conquerors. With all this he put in some general reflections on politics and the conditions of the peace to be imposed on the vanquished. With regard to the latter, I must say he was not exacting:

"'The war indemnity and nothing else. It is no good to take provinces. Can one turn Germany into France?'

"He dictated this with so firm a voice, and one felt so much sincerity in his words, so much patriotic faith, that it was impossible to listen to him unmoved.

"Meanwhile the siege went on—not the siege of Berlin, alas! We were at the worst period of cold, of bombardment, of epidemic, of fam-

ine. But, thanks to our care, and the indefatigable tenderness which surrounded him, the old man's serenity was never for a moment disturbed. Up to the end I was able to procure white bread and fresh meat for him, but for him only. You could not imagine anything more touching than those breakfasts of the grandfather, so innocently egotistic, sitting up in bed, fresh and smiling, the napkin tied under his chin, at his side his granddaughter, pale from her privations, guiding his hands, making him drink, helping him to eat all these good forbidden things. Then, revived by the repast, in the comfort of his warm room, with the wintry wind shut out and the snow eddying about the window, the old Cuirassier would recall his Northern campaigns and would relate to us that disastrous retreat in Russia where there was nothing to eat but frozen biscuit and horseflesh.

"'Can you understand that, little one? We ate horseflesh.'

"I should think she did understand it. For two months she had tasted nothing else. As convalescence approached our task increased daily in difficulty. The numbness of the Colonel's senses, as well as of his limbs, which had hitherto helped us so much, was beginning to pass away. Once or twice already, those terrible volleys at the Porte Maillot had made him start and prick up his ears like a warhorse; we were obliged to invent a recent victory of Bazaine's before Berlin and salvoes fired from the Invalides in honor of it. Another day (the Thursday of Buzenval I think it was) his bed had been pushed to the window,

whence he saw some of the National Guard massed upon the Avenue de la Grande Armée.

"'What soldiers are those?' he asked, and we heard him grumbling beneath his teeth:

"'Badly drilled, badly drilled.'

"Nothing came of this, but we understood that henceforth greater precautions were necessary. Unfortunately we were not careful enough.

"One evening I was met by the child in much trouble.

"'It is to-morrow they make their entry,' she said.

"Could the grandfather's door have been open? In thinking of it since, I remember that all that evening his face wore an extraordinary expression. Probably he had overheard us; only we spoke of the Prussians and he thought of the French, of the triumphal entry he had so long expected, MacMahon descending the Avenue amidst flowers and flourish of trumpets, his own son riding beside the marshal, and he himself on his balcony, in full uniform as at Lützen, saluting the ragged colors and the eagles blackened by powder

"Poor Colonel Jouve! He no doubt imagined that we wished to prevent his taking part in the defile of our troops, lest the emotion should prove too much for him, and therefore took care to say nothing to us; but the next day, just at the time the Prussian battalions cautiously entered the long road leading from the Porte Maillot to the Tuileries, the window up there was softly opened and the Colonel appeared on the

balcony with his helmet, his sword, all his long unused but glorious apparel of Milhaud's Cuirassiers.

"I often ask myself what supreme effort of will, what sudden impulse of fading vitality had placed him thus erect in harness.

"All we know is that he was there, standing at the railing, wondering to find the wide avenues so silent, the shutters all closed, Paris like a great lazaret, flags everywhere, but such strange ones, white with red crosses, and no one to meet our soldiers.

"For a moment he may have thought himself mistaken.

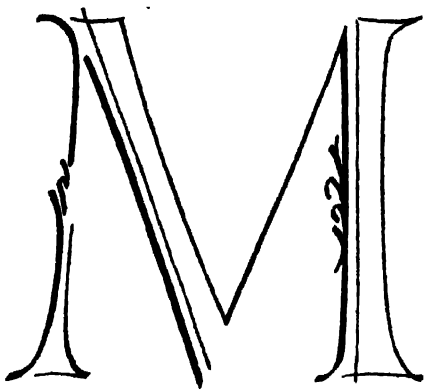
"But no! there, behind the Arc de Triomphe, there was a confused sound, a black line advancing in the growing daylight—then, little by little, the spikes of the helmets glisten, the little drums of Jena begin to beat, and under the Arc de l'Etoile, accompanied by the heavy tramp of the troops, by the clatter of sabres, bursts forth Schubert's Triumphal March.

"In the dead silence of the streets was heard a cry, a terrible cry:

"'To arms!—to arms!—the Prussians.' And the four Uhlans of the advanced guard might have seen up there, on the balcony, a tall old man stagger, wave his arms, and fall. This time Colonel Jouve was dead."



The Sub-Prefect Afield

ONSIEUR THE SUB-PREFECT is on his rounds. With coachman before and lackey behind, the barouche of the sub-prefecture carries him majestically to the agricultural fair of the Combe-aux-Fées. For that memorable day Monsieur the Sub-Prefect has put on his best embroidered coat, his little cocked hat, his tight-fitting breeches with silver bands, and his gala sword with hilt of mother-of-pearl. Upon his lap lies a great portfolio of embossed shagreen, upon which he gazes sadly.

Monsieur the Sub-Prefect gazes sadly on his portfolio of embossed shagreen; he is thinking of the famous speech which he will have to make presently before the citizens of the Combe-aux-Fées. But although he twists the blond silk of his whiskers, and repeats, twenty times over, "Gentlemen and dear constituents," the rest of the speech does not come.

The rest of the speech does not come. It is so hot in the barouche! As far as the eye can reach, the road of the Combe-aux-Fées powders under the sun of the South. The air is scorching, and in the elms that border the road, all covered with white dust, thousands of cicadas answer

one another from tree to tree. Suddenly Monsieur the Sub-Prefect gives a start. Over there, at the foot of a slope, he has just perceived a little wood of green oaks that seems to beckon to him.

The little wood of green oaks seems to beckon to him.

"Come this way, Monsieur the Sub-Prefect; to compose your speech, you will be much more comfortable under my trees."

Monsieur the Sub Prefect is tempted. He jumps from his barouche, and tells his servants to wait for him; that he is going to compose his speech in the little wood of green oaks

In the little wood of green oaks there are birds, violets, and springs under the tender grass. As soon as they saw Monsieur the Sub-Prefect, with his fine breeches and his portfolio of embossed shagreen, the birds felt frightened and stopped singing, the springs no longer dared to make any noise, and the violets hid themselves in the sward. That little world had never seen a sub prefect, and asks itself, in low tones, who that fine gentleman was who walked about in silver breeches.

In low tones, under the leafage, they ask themselves who that fine gentleman is in silver breeches. Meanwhile Monsieur the Sub-Prefect, delighted with the silence and the coolness of the wood, lifts his coat-tails, deposits his cocked hat on the grass, and sits in the moss at the foot of a young oak. Then he opens on his knees his great portfolio of embossed shagreen and takes from it a large sheet of foolscap paper.

"He is an artist," says a warbler

"No," says a bullfinch, "he is not an artist, since he wears silver breeches; he is rather a prince."

"He is rather a prince," says the bullfinch.

"Neither an artist nor a prince," interrupts an old nightingale, who has sung for a whole season in the gardens of the sub-prefecture; "I know what he is; he is a sub-prefect."

And all the little wood goes whispering:

"He is a sub-prefect! He is a sub-prefect!"

"How bald he is!" remarks a lark with a great tuft on his head.

The violets ask:

"Is it dangerous?"

"Is it dangerous?" ask the violets.

The old nightingale answers:

"Not at all!"

And upon that assurance the birds recommence to sing, the springs to run, the violets to shed their perfume, as though the gentleman were not there. Unconscious amid all the merry din, Monsieur the Sub-Prefect invokes in his heart the Muse of agricultural fairs, and with lifted pencil begins to declaim in ceremonial tones:

"Gentlemen and dear constituents—"

"Gentlemen and dear constituents," says the Sub-Prefect, in ceremonial tones.

A burst of laughter interrupts him; he turns around and sees nothing but a fat woodpecker perched upon his cocked hat, who looks at



him and laughs. The Sub-Prefect shrugs his shoulders and tries to continue his speech; but the woodpecker interrupts him anew, and calls out from afar:

"What is the use?"

"How, what is the use!" says the Sub-Prefect, who gets quite red; and chasing away the impudent bird with a gesture, he begins afresh:

"Gentlemen and dear constituents—"

"Gentlemen and dear constituents," begins the Sub-Prefect afresh.

But lo! the little violets lift themselves up towards him on the tips of their stems, and softly say:

"Monsieur, Sub-Prefect, do you perceive how good we smell?"

And the springs made a divine music under the moss, and in the branches over his head many warblers came and sang him their pretty tunes; and all the little wood conspired to prevent him from composing his speech.

All the little wood conspired to prevent him from composing his speech. Monsieur the Sub-Prefect, drunk with perfumes, dazed by music, attempted vainly to resist the new charm that invaded his being. He leaned on his elbows in the grass, unbuttoned his fine coat, stammered again twice or thrice:

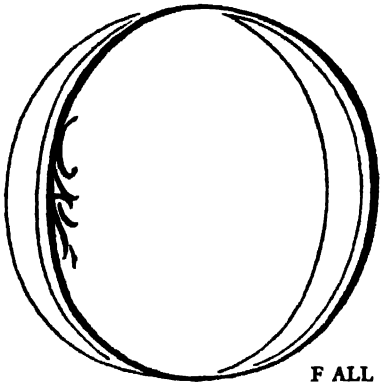
"Gentlemen and dear constituents . . . gentlemen and dear con . . . gentlemen and . . ."

Then he sent his constituents to the devil, and the Muse of agricultural fairs was forced to veil her face.

Veil thy face, O Muse of agricultural fairs! When, at the end of one hour, the servants of the sub-prefecture, anxious about their master, entered the little wood, they saw a sight that made them recoil with horror. Monsieur the Sub-Prefect was lying on his stomach in the grass, as untidy as a bohemian. He had taken off his coat; and, chewing violets, he, Monsieur the Sub-Prefect, was composing verses!



The Pope's Mule



OF ALL the pretty sayings, proverbs, adages, with which our Provençal peasantry decorate their discourses, I know of none more picturesque, or more peculiar than this:—for fifteen leagues around my mill, when they speak of a spiteful and vindictive man, they say: "That fellow! distrust him! he's like the Pope's mule who kept her kick for seven years."

I tried for a long time to find out whence that proverb came, what that Pope's mule was, and why she kept her kick for seven years. No one could give me any information on the subject, not even Francet Mamaï, my old fife-player, though he knows his Provençal legends to the tips of his fingers. Francet thought, as I did, that there must be some ancient chronicle of Avignon behind it, but he had never heard of it otherwise than as a proverb.

"You won't find it anywhere except in the Grasshoppers' Library," said the old man, laughing.

The idea struck me as a good one; and as the Grasshoppers' Library is close at my door, I shut myself up there for over a week.

It is a wonderful library, admirably stocked, open to poets night and day, and served by little librarians with cymbals who make music for you all the time. I spent some delightful days there, and after a week of researches (on my back) I ended by discovering what I wanted, namely: the story of the mule and that famous kick which she kept for seven years. The tale is pretty, though rather naïve, and I shall try to tell it to you just as I read it yesterday in a manuscript colored by the weather, smelling of good dried lavender and tied with the Virgin's threads—as they call gossamer in these parts.

Whoso did not see Avignon in the days of the Popes has seen nothing. For gayety, life, animation, the excitement of festivals, never was a town like it. From morning till night there was nothing but processions, pilgrimages, streets strewn with flowers, draped with tapestries, cardinals arriving by the Rhone, banners in the breeze, galleys dressed in flags, the Pope's soldiers chanting Latin on the squares, and the tinkling rattle of the begging friars; while from garret to cellar of houses that pressed, humming, round the great papal palace like bees around their hive, came the tick-tack of lace-looms, the to-and-fro of shuttles weaving the gold thread of chasubles, the tap-tap of the goldsmith's chasing-tools tapping on the chalices, the turning of choir-instruments at the lutemaker's, the songs of the spinners at their work; and above all this rose the sound of bells, and always the echo of certain tambourines coming from away down there on the bridge of Avignon. Because, with

us, when the people are happy they must dance—they must dance; and as in those days the streets were too narrow for the *farandole,* fifes and tambourines posted themselves on the bridge of Avignon in the fresh breeze of the Rhone, and day and night folks danced, they danced. Ah! the happy times! the happy town! Halberds that did not wound, prisons where the wine was put to cool; no hunger, no war. That's how the Popes of the Comtat governed their people; and that's why their people so deeply regretted them.

There was one Pope especially, a good old man called Boniface. Ah! that one, many were the tears shed in Avignon when he was dead. He was so amiable, so affable a prince! He laughed so merrily on the back of his mule! And when you passed him, were you only a poor little gatherer of madder-roots, or the grand provost of the town, he gave you his benediction so politely! A real Pope of Yvetot, but an Yvetot of Provence, with something delicate in his laugh, a sprig of sweet marjoram in his cardinal's cap, and never a Jeanneton,—the only Jeanneton he was ever known to have, that good Father, was his vineyard, his own little vineyard which he planted himself, three leagues from Avignon, among the myrtles of Château-Neuf.

Every Sunday, after vespers, the good man paid court to his vine yard; and when he was up there, sitting in the blessed sun, his mule near him, his cardinals stretched out beneath the grapevines, he would order a flask of the wine of his own growth to be opened,—that beauti-

ful wine, the color of rubies, which is now called the *Château-Neuf des Papes,* and he sipped it with sips, gazing at his vineyard tenderly. Then, the flask empty, the day fading, he rode back joyously to town, the Chapter following; and when he crossed the bridge of Avignon through the tambourines and the *farandoles,* his mule, set going by the music, paced along in a skipping little amble, while he himself beat time to the dance with his cap, which greatly scandalized the cardinals but made the people say: "Ah! the good prince! Ah! the kind Pope!"

What the Pope loved best in the world, next to his vineyard of Châteauneuf, was his mule. The good man doted on that animal. Every evening before he went to bed he went to see if the stable was locked, if nothing was lacking in the manger; and never did he rise from table without seeing with his own eyes the preparation of a great bowl of wine in the French fashion with sugar and spice, which he took to his mule himself, in spite of the remarks of his cardinals. It must be said that the animal was worth the trouble. She was a handsome black mule, with reddish points, sure-footed, hide shining, back broad and full, carrying proudly her thin little head decked out with pompons and ribbons, silver bells and streamers; gentle as an angel withal, innocent eyes, and two long ears, always shaking, which gave her the look of a downright good fellow. All Avignon respected her, and when she passed through the streets there were no civilities that the people did not pay her; for every one knew there was no better way to stand well

at court, and that the Pope's mule, for all her innocent look, had led more than one man to fortune,—witness Tistet Védène and his amazing adventure.

This Tistet Védène was, in point of fact, an impudent young rogue, whom his father, Guy Védène, the goldsmith, had been forced to turn out of his house, because he would not work and only debauched the apprentices. For six months Tistet dragged his jacket through all the gutters of Avignon, but principally those near the papal palace; for the rascal has a notion in his head about the Pope's mule, and you shall now see what mischief was in it.

One day when his Holiness was riding all alone beneath the ramparts, behold our Tistet approaching him and saying, with his hands clasped in admiration:

"Ah! *mon Dieu,* Holy Father, what a fine mule you are riding! Just let me look at her. Ah! Pope, what a mule! The Emperor of Germany hasn't her equal."

And he stroked her and spoke to her softly as if to a pretty young lady:

"Come here, my treasure, my jewel, my pearl——"

And the good Pope, quite touched, said to himself:

"What a nice young fellow; how kind he is to my mule!"

And the next day what do you think happened? Tistet Védène changed his yellow jacket for a handsome lace alb, a purple silk hood, shoes with buckles; and he entered the household of the Pope, where

no one had ever yet been admitted but sons of nobles and nephews of cardinals. That's what intriguing means! But Tistet was not satisfied with that.

Once in the Pope's service, the rascal continued the game he had played so successfully. Insolent to every one, he showed attentions and kindness to none but the mule, and he was always to be met with in the courtyards of the palace with a handful of oats, or a bunch of clover, shaking its pink blooms at the window of the Holy Father as if to say: "Hein! who's that for, hey?" Time and again this happened, so that, at last, the good Pope, who felt himself getting old, left to Tistet the care of looking after the stable and of carrying to the mule his bowl of wine,—which did not cause the cardinals to laugh.

Nor the mule either. For now, at the hour her wine was due she beheld half a dozen little pages of the household slipping hastily into the hay with their hoods and their laces; and then, soon after, a good warm smell of caramel and spices pervaded the stable, and Tistet Védène appeared bearing carefully the bowl of hot wine. Then the poor animal's martyrdom began.

That fragrant wine she loved, which kept her warm and gave her wings, they had the cruelty to bring it into her stall and let her smell of it; then, when her nostrils were full of the perfume, away! and the beautiful rosy liquor went down the throats of those young scamps! And not only did they steal her wine, but they were like devils, those

young fellows, after they had drunk it. One pulled her ears, another her tail. Quiquet jumped on her back, Béluguet put his hat on her head, and not one of the rascals ever thought that with one good kick of her hind-legs the worthy animal could send them all to the polar star, and farther still if she chose. But no! you are not the Pope's mule for nothing—that mule of benedictions and plenary indulgences. The lads might do what they liked, she was never angry with them; it was only Tistet Védène whom she hated. He, indeed! when she felt him behind her, her hoofs itched; and reason enough too. That good-for-nothing Tistet played her such villainous tricks. He had such cruel ideas and inventions after drinking.

One day he took it into his head to make her go with him into the belfry, high up, very high up, to the peak of the palace! What I am telling you is no tale; two hundred thousand Provençal men and women saw it. Imagine the terror of that unfortunate mule, when, after turning for an hour, blindly, round a corkscrew staircase and climbing I don't know how many steps, she found herself all of a sudden on a platform blazing with light, while a thousand feet below her she saw a diminutive Avignon, the booths in the market no bigger than nuts, the Pope's soldiers moving about their barracks like little red ants, and down there, bright as a silver thread, a microscopic little bridge on which they were dancing, dancing. Ah! poor beast! what a panic! At the cry she gave, all the windows of the palace shook.



"What's the matter? what are they doing to my mule?" cried the good Pope, rushing out upon his balcony.

Tistet Védène was already in the courtyard, pretending to weep and tear his hair.

"Ah! great Holy Father, what's the matter, indeed! *Mon Dieu!* what will become of us? There's your mule gone up to the belfry."

"All alone?"

"Yes, great Holy Father, all alone. Look up there, high up. Don't you see the tips of her ears pointing out—like two swallows?"

"Mercy!" cried the poor Pope, raising his eyes. "Why, she must have gone mad! She'll kill herself! Come down, come down, you luckless thing!"

Pécaire! she wanted nothing so much as to come down; but how? which way? The stairs? not to be thought of; they can be mounted, those things; but as for going down! why, they are enough to break one's legs a hundred times. The poor mule was in despair, and while circling round and round the platform with her big eyes full of vertigo she thought of Tistet Védène.

"Ah! bandit, if I only escape—what a kick to-morrow morning!"

That idea of a kick put some courage into her heart; without it she never could have held good.

At last, they managed to save her, but it was quite a serious affair. They had to get her down with a derrick, ropes, and a sling. You can fancy what humiliation it was for a Pope's mule to see herself suspended

at that height, her four hoofs swimming in the void like a cockchafer hanging to a string. And all Avignon looking at her!

The unfortunate beast could not sleep at night. She fancied she was still turning round and round that cursèd platform while the town laughed below, and again she thought of the infamous Tistet and the fine kick of her heels she would let fly at him next day. Ah! friends, what a kick! the dust of it would be seen as far as Pampérigouste.

Now, while this notable reception was being made ready for him in the Pope's stable, what do you think Tistet Védène was about? He was descending the Rhone on a papal galley, singing as he went his way to the Court of Naples with a troop of young nobles whom the town of Avignon sent every year to Queen Jeanne to practice diplomacy and fine manners. Tistet Védène was not noble; but the Pope was bent on rewarding him for the care he had given to his mule, and especially for the activity he displayed in saving her from her perilous situation.

The mule was the disappointed party on the morrow!

"Ah! the bandit! he suspected something," she thought, shaking her silver bells. "No matter for that, scoundrel; you'll find it when you get back, that kick; I'll keep it for you!"

And she kept it for him.

After Tistet's departure, the Pope's mule returned to her tranquil way of life and her usual proceedings. No more Quiquet, no more Béluguet in the stable. The good old days of the spiced wine came

back, and with them good-humor, long siestas, and the little gavotte step as she crossed the bridge of Avignon. Nevertheless, since her adventure a certain coldness was shown to her in the town. Whisperings were heard as she passed, old people shook their heads, children laughed and pointed to the belfry. The good Pope himself no longer had quite the same confidence in his friend, and when he let himself go into a nice little nap on her back of a Sunday, returning from his vineyard, he always had this thought latent in his mind: "What if I should wake up there on the platform!" The mule felt this, and she suffered, but said nothing; only, whenever the name of Tistet Védène was uttered in her hearing, her long ears quivered, and she struck the iron of her shoes hard upon the pavement with a little snort.

Seven years went by. Then, at the end of those seven years, Tistet Védène returned from the Court of Naples. His time was not yet finished over there, but he had heard that the Pope's head mustard-bearer had died suddenly at Avignon, and as the place seemed a good one, he hurried back in haste to solicit it.

When this intriguing Védène entered the palace the Holy Father did not recognize him, he had grown so tall and so stout. It must also be said that the good Pope himself had grown older, and could not see much without spectacles.

Tistet was not abashed.

"What, great Holy Father! you don't remember me? It is I, Tistet Védène."

"Védène?"

"Why, yes, you know the one that took the wine to your mule."

"Ah! yes, yes,—I remember. A good little fellow, that Tistet Védène! And now, what do you want of me?"

"Oh! very little, great Holy Father. I came to ask—By the bye, have you still got her, that mule of yours? Is she well? Ah! good! I came to ask you for the place of the chief mustard-bearer who lately died."

"Mustard-bearer, you! Why you are too young. How old are you?"

"Twenty-two, illustrious pontiff; just five years older than your mule. Ah! palm of God, what a fine beast she is! If you only knew how I love her, that mule,—how I pined for her in Italy! Won't you let me see her?"

"Yes, my son, you shall see her," said the worthy Pope quite touched. "And as you love her so much I must have you live near her. Therefore, from this day I attach you to my person as chief mustard-bearer. My cardinals will cry out, but no matter! I'm used to that. Come and see me tomorrow, after vespers, and you shall receive the insignia of your rank in presence of the whole Chapter, and then I will show you the mule and you shall go to the vineyard with us, hey! hey!"

I need not tell you if Tistet Védène was content when he left the palace, and with what impatience he awaited the ceremony of the morrow. And yet, there was one more impatient and more content than he; it was the mule. After Védène's return, until vespers on the following day that terrible animal never ceased to stuff herself with oats, and

practice her heels on the wall behind her. She, too, was preparing for the ceremony.

Well, on the morrow, when vespers were said, Tistet Védène made his entry into the papal courtyard. All the grand clergy were there; the cardinals in their red robes, the devil's advocate in black velvet, the convent abbots in their small miters, the wardens of Saint-Agrico, the violet hoods of the Pope's household, the lower clergy also, the Pope's guard in full uniform, the three penitential brotherhoods, the hermits of Mont-Ventoux, with their sullen faces, and the little clerk who walks behind them with a bell, the flagellating friars naked to the waist, the ruddy sextons in judges' gowns, all, all, down to the givers of holy water, and the man who lights and him who puts out the candles—not one was missing. Ah! it was a fine ordination! Bells, firecrackers, sunshine, music, and always those frantic tambourines leading the *farandole* over there, on the bridge.

When Védène appeared in the midst of this great assembly, his fine bearing and handsome face sent a murmur of admiration through the crowd. He was truly a magnificent Provençal; but of the blonde type, with thick hair curling at the tips, and a dainty little beard, that looked like slivers of fine metal fallen from the chisel of his father, the goldsmith. The rumor ran that the fingers of Queen Jeanne had sometimes played in the curls of that golden beard; and, in truth, the Sieur de Védène had the self-glorifying air and the abstracted look of men that queens have loved. On this day, in order to do honor to his native town,

he had substituted for his Neapolitan clothes a tunic edged with pink, *à la Provençale,* and in his hood there quivered a tall feather of the Camargue ibis.

As soon as he entered the new official bowed with a gallant air, and approached the high portico where the Pope was waiting to give him the insignias of his rank, namely, a wooden spoon and a saffron coat. The mule was at the foot of the steps, saddled and bridled, all ready to go to the vineyard; as he passed beside her, Tistet Védène smiled pleasantly, and stopped to give her a friendly pat or two on the back, glancing, as he did so, out of the corner of his eye to see if the Pope noticed it. The position was just right,—the mule let fly her heels.•

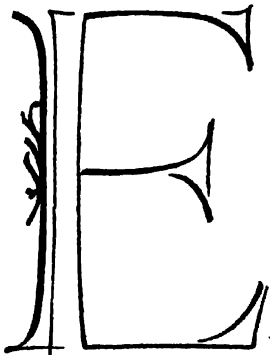
"There, take it, villain! Seven years have I kept it for thee!"

And she gave him so terrible a kick,—so terrible that even at Pampérigouste the smoke was seen, a whirlwind of blonde dust, in which flew the feather of an ibis, and that was all that remained of the unfortunate Tistet Védène!

Mule kicks are not usually so destructive; but this was a papal mule; and then, just think! she had kept it for him for seven years. There is no finer example of ecclesiastical rancor.



A Game of Billiards



VEN SOLDIERS are exhausted after two days' fighting, especially if they have passed the night, knapsacks upon their backs, torrents of rain descending upon them. And yet for three mortal hours they had been left to wait in the puddles along the highway, in the mire of fields soaked with rain.

Heavy with fatigue, weakened by the effects of previous nights, their uniforms drenched, they pressed closer together for warmth and support. Here and there, leaning upon a neighbor's knapsack, a man had fallen asleep standing; and upon the relaxed faces of these men, overcome by sleep, might be read more plainly than before the traces which weariness and privations had made. In the mud and rain, without fire, without food, overhead a sky heavy and lowering—around them, on every side, the enemy! Dismal indeed!

What are they doing yonder? What is going on?

The guns, their mouths turned towards the woods, seem to be lying in wait. From their hiding places the machine guns stare fixedly at the horizon. All is ready for an attack. Why is none made? For what are they waiting?

They await orders from headquarters, but none come.

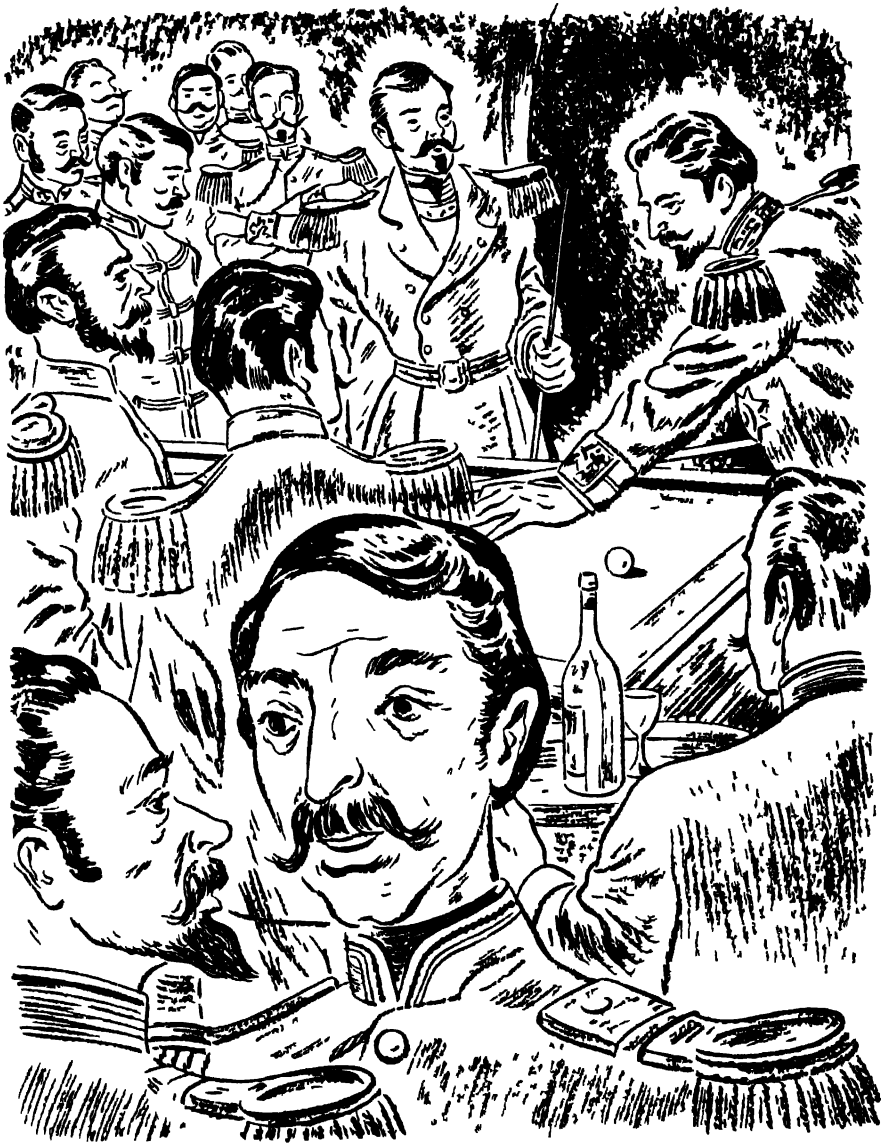
And yet it is only a short distance to headquarters, to that beautiful Louis XIII château whose red-brick walls, washed by the rain, are seen halfway up the hill, glistening through the thickets. Truly a princely dwelling, well worthy of bearing the banner of a Marshal of France. Separated from the main road by a big trench and a ramp of stone, are green, smooth-shaven lawns extending even to the stone steps of the château, and bordered with vases of flowers. On the side of the house farthest away from the road, the daylight darts through the leafage of the arbors, making bright openings in them. Upon an artificial pond which sparkles like a mirror, swans are swimming, and under the pagoda-shaped roof of a large aviary peacocks and golden pheasants strut about, spreading their wings and sending their shrill cries through the foliage. Though the owners of the house have departed, there is nowhere a perceptible sign of that ruin and utter desolation which war brings in its train. Under the oriflamme of the chief of the army, not the smallest flower dotting the lawn has been destroyed, and it is indescribably charming to discover, so near the field of battle, that calm and opulence that result from systematic care, and to observe such evenly trimmed shrubberies, such silent avenues of shade. The rain, which in its descent elsewhere has rutted the roads and heaped them with mire, in this quarter has been nothing more than an aristocratic shower. Nothing vulgar about it. It has revived the red tints of the bricks, the verdure of the lawns; it has added fresh luster to the leaves of the

orange trees, to the swans' white plumage. Everything glistens. The scene is peaceful. In fact, were it not for the flag floating from the top of the roof, and the sight of two sentinels before the gate, one would never believe headquarters were here.

The horses are resting in the stables; here and there officers' servants are seen, and orderlies in undress, lounging about the kitchens of the château, and now and then a gardener tranquilly dragging his rake through the sand of the grounds.

In the dining room, whose windows front the entrance of the château, is seen a table partly cleared, bottles uncorked, glasses tarnished, empty and dimmed, resting upon the wrinkled cloth—in short, every indication that the repast is ended. The guests have departed, but in a side room loud voices are heard, peals of laughter, the rolling of billiard balls, and the clinking of glasses. The Marshal has just started upon his game, and that is why the army is waiting for orders. Once the Marshal has begun, the heavens might fall, but nothing on earth would hinder him from finishing his game.

For if the mighty soldier has a single weakness, it is his fondness for billiards. There he stands, as grave as though a battle had begun; he is in full uniform, his breast covered with decorations; his repast, the grog he has drunken, and the excitement of the game animate him. His eyes sparkle, and his cheek-bones are flushed. About him gather his aides-de-camp, most assiduous in their attentions, deferential, and overcome with admiration at each of his shots. When the Marshal



makes a point, they rush towards the mark. Is the Marshal thirsty? Each one desires to prepare his grog! Such a rustling of epaulettes and panaches, such a rattling of crosses and aiguillettes! How they bow and smile, these courtiers! What elegance and charm of manner! And then to see such embroideries, so many new uniforms, in this lofty chamber carved in oak, opening upon parks and courts of honor! It reminds one of those autumns of Compiègne, and makes him forget for a moment those figures in muddied cloaks, gathered yonder in the roads, making such somber groups, as they wait in the rain.

The Marshal's adversary is an officer of his staff, a little captain who curls and laces and wears light gloves; he is an excellent shot at billiards, and could beat all the marshals on earth, but he understands how to keep at a respectful distance from his chief, and exercises all his skill in playing so that he shall neither win, nor seem to lose, too readily. Evidently an officer with an eye for the future.

Attention, young man, look out! The Marshal is five points ahead. If you can end the game as you have begun it, your promotion is surer than it would be, were you standing outside with the others, beneath those torrents of water that darken the horizon. It would be a pity, too, to soil that fine uniform, and tarnish the gold of its aiguillettes, waiting for orders that never come.

The game is extremely interesting. The balls roll, graze each other, and pass; they rebound. Every moment the play grows more exciting. But suddenly a flash of light is seen in the sky and the report of a cannon

is heard. A heavy, rumbling sound shakes the windows. Everyone starts and casts an uneasy glance about him. The Marshal alone remains unmoved. He sees nothing, hears nothing, for, leaning over the table, he is about to make a magnificent draw-shot. Draw-shots are his forte!

But again that flash, and again! From the cannon fresh reports, and nearer together now. The aides-de-camp run to the window. Can it be that the Prussians are attacking?

"Let them!" says the Marshal, chalking his cue. "Your turn, captain!"

The staff thrills with admiration. Turenne asleep upon a gun carriage was nothing compared to this marshal, so calmly absorbed in his game at the moment of action! But all this time the tumult increases. With the shock of the cannon mingles the rattling of the machine guns, and the rumbling of volley upon volley; a reddish cloud dark at the edges rises from the further end of the lawn. All the rear of the park is on fire. Frightened peacocks and pheasants clamor in the aviary, Arabian horses, away in the stables, scent the powder and rear in their stalls. At headquarters a general commotion begins. Despatch follows despatch. Messengers arrive at a gallop. Everywhere they are asking for the Marshal.

But the Marshal is unapproachable. Have I not told you that nothing in the world could hinder him from finishing a game once begun?

"Your play, captain—"

But the captain is distracted. Ah! Youth is youth. He loses his head, forgets what he is about, and makes two successive runs which almost win the game for him. And now the Marshal is furious. Surprise and indignation are visible upon his manly features. At this very moment a horse rushes into the courtyard at full speed and drops exhausted. An aide-de-camp, covered with mud, forces the sentry, makes one bound over the stone steps, crying, "Marshal, Marshal!" And this is his reception: the Marshal, red as a cock, and swelling with anger, appears at the window, cue in hand.

"Who is there? What is it? Is there no sentry here?"

"But, Marshal—"

"Oh, yes, yes—later—let them wait for my orders—in God's name!"

And the window closes with a bang.

Let them wait for his orders! And that is exactly what they are doing, these poor fellows. The wind drives rain and grapeshot in their faces. Whole battalions are slaughtered, whilst others, perfectly useless, stand bearing arms, unable to understand why they remain inactive. Nothing else to do. They wait for orders. But men may die without word of command, and these men die in hundreds, falling behind bushes, dropping in trenches in front of that great silent château. And even after death, the grapeshot continues to lacerate their bodies, and from those gaping wounds flows a silent stream—the generous blood

of France. And above, yonder, in the billiard room, all is as excited as upon the battlefield, for the Marshal has regained his advantage, and the little captain is playing like a lion.

Seventeen! eighteen! nineteen! Scarcely time to mark the points. The sound of battle grows nearer and nearer. The Marshal has but one more point to play for. Already shells are falling in the park. One has burst in the pond. Its glassy sheet reddens, and a terrified swan is seen swimming amid a whirl of bloody plumage. And now the last shot.

And then—deep silence. Only the sound of rain falling upon the leafage of the arbors, only an indistinct rumbling noise at the foot of the hill, and along the muddy roads a sound like the tramping of hurrying herds. The army is in full retreat. The Marshal has won his game.



At the Palais de Justice

I KNOW NOT if it be from lack of habit, but I can never enter the Palais de Justice without an uneasiness, an inexplicable heart pang. That grating, those great courts, that stone staircase so vast that every one mounts it in isolation, enveloped in his individual torment. The antiquity of the structures, the melancholy clock, the height of the windows, and also the mist of the quay, that moisture that clings to walls that skirt the water, all give you a foretaste of the neighboring prison. In the halls the impression is the same, or more vivid still, because of the peculiar company which peoples them, because of those long black robes which make the solemn gestures, because of those who accuse, and the unintelligible records, the eternal records spread out everywhere on the tables, carried under the arms in enormous bundles, overflowing—

There are great green doors, noiseless and mysterious, from whence escape—when they are ajar—gusts of voices severe or weeping, and visions of school benches, platforms black with caps, and great crucifixes leaning forward. Muskets ring out on the flags. Sinister rumblings

of carriages pass shaking the arches. All these noises blended together are like a respiration, the panting breath of a factory, the apparatus of justice at work. And hearing this terrible machine at labor, one desires to shrink within himself, to dwindle for fear of being caught, even by a hair, in this formidable gearing which one knows to be so complicated, tenacious, destructive—

I was thinking of this the other morning, in going to see an examining magistrate before whom I had, in behalf of a poor devil, to recommend a stay of proceedings. The hall of witnesses, where I was waiting, was full of people, sheriff's officers, clerks engrossing behind a glass partition, witnesses whispering to each other in advance of their depositions, women of the people, impressive and garrulous, who were telling the officers their entire lives in order to arrive at the affair that had brought them there. Near me, an open door lit the sombre lobby of the examining magistrate, a lobby which leads everywhere, even to the scaffold, and from which the prisoners issue as accused. Some of these unfortunates, brought there under a strong escort by way of the staircase of la Conciergerie, lay about on the benches awaiting their turn to be interrogated, and it is in this ante-chamber of the convict prison that I overheard a lovers' dialogue, an idyl of the faubourg, as impassioned as "l'Oarystis," but more heartbreaking-- Yes, in the midst of this shadow, where so many criminals have left something of their shuddering, of their hopes, and of their rages, I saw two beings love, and smile; and however lowly was this love, however faded was this smile, the old

lobby must have been as astonished by it as would a miry and black street of Paris, if penetrated by the cooing of a turtle-dove.

In a listless attitude, almost unconscious, a young girl was seated at the end of a bench, quiet as a working woman who waits the price of her day's labor. She wore the calico bonnet and the sad costume of Saint-Lazare with an air of repose and of well-being, as though the prison régime were the best thing she had found in all her life. The guard, who sat beside her, seemed to find her much to his taste, and they laughed together softly. At the other end of the lobby, wholly in the shadow, was seated, handcuffs on wrists, the Desgrieux of this Manon. She had not seen him at first; but as soon as her eyes became accustomed to the darkness, she perceived him and trembled: "Why, that's Pignou—hé! Pignou!"—

The guard silenced her. The prisoners are expressly forbidden to talk to each other.

"Oh! I beg of you, only one word!" she said, leaning far forward toward the remotest part of the lobby.

But the soldier remained inflexible. "No—no—it can't be done—only if you have some message to give him, tell it to me, I will repeat it to him."

Then a dialogue was entered into between this girl and her Pignou, with the guard as interpreter.

Much moved, without heeding those about her, she began:

"Tell him I have never loved any one but him; that I will never love another in all my life."

The guard made a number of steps in the lobby, and redoubling his gravity as though to take from the proceeding all that was too kindly, he repeated: "She says she has never loved but you, and that she'll never love another."

I heard a grumbling, a confused stammering which must have been the response of Pignou, then the guard went back with measured step toward the bench.

"What did he say?" demanded the child all anxious, and as though waiting were too long: "Well, tell me what he said now?"

"He said he was very miserable!"—

Then, carried away by her emotion and the custom of the noisy and communicative streets, she cried out loud:

"Don't be weary, m'ami—the good days will come again!"

And in this voice, still young, there was something piteous, almost maternal. Plainly this was the woman of the people with her courage under affliction and her dog-like devotion.

From the depths of the lobby, a voice replied, the voice of Pignou, wine-soaked, torn, burned with alcohol:

"*Va donc!* the good days—I'll have them at the end of my five years."

He knew his case well, that one!—

The guards cried: "*Chut!*—Keep quiet!"—But too late.

A door had opened, and the examining magistrate himself appeared on the sill.

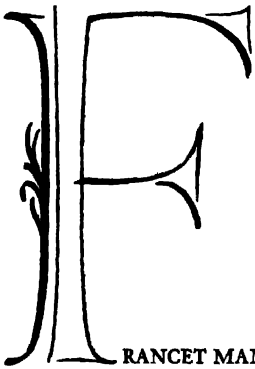
Skull-cap of velvet, grizzled whiskers, mouth thin and evil, the eye scrutinizing, distrustful, but not profound, it was just the type of an examining magistrate, one of those men who thinks he has a criminal before him always, like those doctors of the insane who see maniacs everywhere. That one in particular had a certain way of looking at you, so annoying, and so insulting, that you felt guilty without having done anything. With one glance of the eye he terrified all the lobby: "What does all this noise mean?—Try to do your duty a little better," he said, addressing the guards. Then he closed his door with a sharp click.

The municipal guard taken to task, red, mortified, looked around a moment for some one upon whom to lay the blame. But the little girl said nothing more, Pignou sat quiet on his bench— All at once he perceived me, and as I was at the door of the hall, almost in the lobby, he took me by the arm and jerked me around brutally.

"What are you doing there, you?"



The Secret of Maître Cornille



RANCET MAMAÏ, an old fife-player, who comes from time to time to make a night of it with me, drinking boiled wine, related the other evening a little village drama of which my mill was the witness some twenty years ago. The old man's story touched me, and I shall try to tell it to you just as I heard it.

Imagine, for the moment, my dear readers, that you are sitting before a pot of fragrant wine and that an old Provençal fife-player is speaking to you.

Our countryside, my good monsieur, was not always such a dead region and without renown as it is to-day. There was a time when the millers did a great trade, and from ten leagues round the farmers brought us their wheat to grind. The hills all about the village were covered with windmills. To right and left one saw nothing but sails twirling to the mistral above the pines, strings of little donkeys laden with sacks going up and down the roads; and all the week it was a pleasure to hear on the heights the crack of the whips, the rattle of the

sails and the *Dia huel* of the millers' men. On Sundays we went to the mills in parties. The millers, they paid for the muscat. The wives were as fine as queens, with their lace kerchiefs and their gold crosses. I took my fife and till it was pitch-dark night they danced the farandole. Those mills, you see, they made the joy and the wealth of our parts.

Unluckily the Paris Frenchmen took an idea to establish a steam flour-mill on the road to Tarascon. Fine thing, great novelty! People took a habit of sending their wheat to the flour-dealers, and the poor windmills were left without work. For some time they tried to struggle, but steam was the stronger, and, one after the other, *pecaire!* they were forced to shut up. No more files of little donkeys. The handsome wives had to sell their gold crosses. No more muscat! No more farandole! The mistral might blow, but the sails stood still. And then, one fine day, the village rulers ordered all those mills pulled down and their place to be sown with vines and olives.

But in the midst of this general downfall one mill held good and continued to turn courageously on its knoll before the very nose of the steam-millers. That was Maître Cornille's mill, the very one where we are at this moment.

Maître Cornille was an old miller, living for sixty years in flour and mad for his business. The coming of the steam-millers had really made him half crazy. For a week he ran about the village inciting the people

and shouting with all his might that they wanted to poison Provence with steam flour. "Don't go there," he cried; "those brigands in making bread use steam, an invention of the devil, whereas I work by the mistral and the tramontana, which are the breath of the good God." And he spoke out a lot of fine sayings like that in praise of the windmills, but nobody listened to them.

Then, in a fury, the old fellow shut himself up in his mill and lived alone, like a savage beast. He would not even keep his little granddaughter, Vivette, with him, a child of fifteen, who, since the death of her parents, had no one but her *grand* in the world. The poor little thing was now obliged to earn her living, and to hire herself out in the farms wherever she could, for the harvest, the silk-worm times, and the olive-picking. And yet her grandfather seemed to love her, that child. He would often go his four leagues afoot, in the hot sun, to see her at the farm where she worked; and when he was near her he would spend whole hours gazing at her and weeping.

In the neighborhood, people thought that the old miller was niggardly in sending Vivette away, and they said that it did not do him credit to let his granddaughter roam from one farmhouse to another, exposed to the brutality of the bailiffs and to all the miseries of young girls in her condition. And they also thought it very wrong of Maître Cornille, who up to this time had respected himself, to go about the streets like a regular gypsy, barefooted, cap in holes, and trousers ragged. In fact, on Sundays, when we saw him come in to mass, we were



ashamed of him, we old fellows; and Cornille felt it so much that he dared not come and sit upon the workmen's bench. He always stayed at the end of the church, close to the holywater basin, among the paupers.

In Maître Cornille's life there was something we could not make out. For a long time past no one in the village had taken him wheat, yet the sails of his mill were always turning, as before. Folks saw the old miller at dusk upon the roads, driving before him his donkey laden with stout sacks of flour.

"Good vespers, Maître Cornille!" the peasants would call to him. "So the mill is going still?"

"Going still, my sons," the old fellow answered with a lively air. "Thank God, it is not work that we lack."

Then, if any one asked him where the devil he found all that work, he would lay a finger on his lips and answer, gravely: "Mum's the word! I am working for exportation." And never could anything further be got out of him.

As for putting your nose in his mill, that was not to be thought of. Little Vivette herself was not allowed to enter.

If we passed in front of it, the door was always seen to be closed, the heavy sails were in motion, the old donkey was browsing on the turf of the platform, and a tall, thin cat, taking the sun on the sill of the window, looked at us malignantly.

All this had the scent of some mystery about it, and made people

gossip. Every one explained in his own way the secret of Maître Cornille, but the general rumor was that there were even more sacks of silver crowns in the mill than sacks of flour.

In the end, however, all was found out; and this was how:—

I discovered, one fine day, while making the young people dance with my fife, that the eldest of my sons and little Vivette were in love with each other. In my heart I wasn't sorry, because, after all, the name of Cornille was held in honor among us, and, besides, I knew it would give me pleasure to see that pretty little sparrow of a Vivette hopping about my house. Only, as the lovers had many occasions to be together, I wished, for fear of accidents, to settle the thing at once. So up I went to the mill to say a word or two to the grandfather. Ah! the old wizard! you should just have seen the way he received me! Impossible to make him open the door. I explained the matter as well as I could through the keyhole; and all the while that I was speaking, that rascally lean cat was puffing like a devil above my head.

The old man didn't give me time to finish, but shouted to me, most uncivilly, to get back to my fife, and that if I was in such a hurry to marry my son, I could go and get a girl at the steam-mill. You can think if my blood didn't rise to hear such words; but, all the same, I had wisdom enough to control myself, and, leaving the old madman in his mill, I returned to tell the children of my failure. Poor lambs! they could not believe it; they begged me, as a favor, to let them go to the mill them-

selves and speak to grandpapa. I hadn't the courage to refuse, and prrrt! off went my lovers.

When they got to the mill, Maître Cornille had just gone out. The door was locked and double locked, but the old man had left his ladder outside, and immediately the idea came to the children to get in through the window and see what was really going on inside of the famous mill.

Singular thing! the room of the millstone was empty. Not a sack, not a grain of wheat, not the slightest sign of flour on the walls or the spiders' webs! There was not even that good warm smell of crushed wheat that scents a mill so pleasantly. The horizontal bar was covered with dust, and the great lean cat was sleeping on it.

The lower room had the same air of utter poverty and abandonment,—a wretched bed, a few rags, a morsel of bread on a step of the stairway, and, in a corner, three or four worn-out sacks, from which oozed plaster rubbish and chalky earth.

There was the secret of Maître Cornille! It was plaster rubbish that he carried in the evening along the roads to save the honor of the mill and to make believe it was grinding flour. Poor mill! Poor Cornille! For many a long day the steam-mill had robbed them of their last customer. The sails still turned, but the millstone revolved in a void.

The children returned in tears, and told me what they had seen. My heart almost burst as I listened. Not losing a minute, I ran to the neighbors; I told them the thing in a word, and we all agreed that we

must at once carry what wheat there was in the village to Cornille's mill. No sooner said than done. The whole village started, and we arrived at the top with a procession of donkeys laden with wheat,—real wheat, that was!

The mill was wide open. Before the door Maître Cornille, seated on a sack of plaster, was weeping, his head in his hands. He had just discovered, on returning, that during his absence some one had entered the mill and surprised his sad secret.

"Poor me!" he was saying. "There's nothing for me to do now but to die. The mill is dishonored."

And he sobbed to break one's heart, calling his mill all sorts of names, and talking to it as if to a real person.

At this moment the donkeys appeared on the terrace, and we all began to shout very loud, as in the good old days of the millers:—

"Ohè! the mill! Ohè! Maître Cornille!"

And there were the sacks piled up before the door, and the fine ruddy grain spilling over to the ground on all sides.

Maître Cornille opened his eyes very wide. In the hollow of his old hand he scooped up some of the wheat and said, laughing and weeping together:—

"It is wheat! . . . Lord God! . . . Good wheat! Let me alone, let me look at it."

Then, turning towards us, he added:—

"Ah! I knew you would all come back to me. Those steam-mill fellows are thieves."

We wanted to carry him off in triumph to the village.

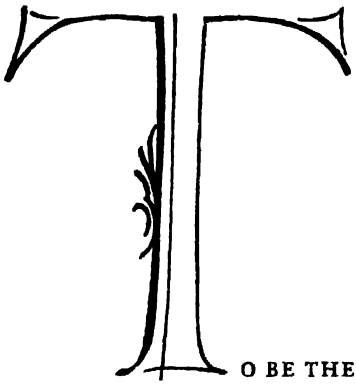
"No, no, children," he said. "I must first feed my mill. Just think how long it is since she had a morsel between her teeth!"

And we all had tears in our eyes to see the poor old fellow wandering right and left, opening the sacks, watching the millstone, while the wheat was being crushed and the fine powdery flour flew up to the ceiling.

To do ourselves justice, I must tell you that from that day we never let the old miller lack for work. Then, one morning, Maître Cornille died, and the sails of our last mill ceased to turn—forever, this time. Cornille dead, no one took his place. But what of that, monsieur? All things come to an end in this world, and we must believe that the days of windmills are over, like those of the barges on the Rhone, the parliaments, and the grand flowered jackets.



Credo of Love



O BE THE WIFE of a poet—that had been the dream of her life! But ruthless fate doomed her not to the romantic and fevered existence she sighed for, but to a peaceful, humdrum existence as the wife of a rich man at Auteuil, gentle and amiable, perhaps a trifle too old for her, and possessed of a single passion—horticulture. This excellent man spent his days scissors in hand, tending and trimming a magnificent collection of rose trees, heating a greenhouse, watering flower beds. For a poor little heart hungering for an ideal, this was not sufficient food.

For ten years her life remained straight and even, like the smooth sanded paths in her husband's garden; and she pursued it with measured steps, listening with resigned weariness to the dry and irritating sound of the ever-moving scissors, or to the monotonous and endless showers that fell from the watering pots onto the leafy shrubbery. The rabid horticulturist bestowed upon his wife the same scrupulous attention he gave to his flowers. He carefully regulated the temperature of the drawing room, overcrowded with nosegays, fearing the April

frosts or the March sun for her sake. He made her live methodically, like the plants in the pots that are put out and taken in at stated times.

She endured this for years, confined in the conjugal garden, innocent as a clematis, but envious of other gardens less staid, less humdrum, where the rose trees would fling out their branches untrained, and briars blossom with unknown and fantastic flowers. Since such gardens are rarely found save in the books of poets, she read many verses of the sort unknown to her nurseryman husband, who was familiar only with a few almanac distichs such as:

When it rains on Saint Medard's day,
It rains for forty more, they say.

The unhappy creature ravenously devoured the trashiest rhymes, satisfied if she found in them lines which ended with the word "love" and "passion." Then, closing the book, she would spend hours dreaming and sighing: "That poet would have been the husband for me!"

It is likely that all this never would have gotten beyond the state of vague longing if, when she reached the terrible age of thirty (which seems to be the decisive critical moment for a woman's virtue, as twelve o'clock is for the day's beauty), the irresistible Amaury had not chanced to cross her path. Amaury was a drawing-room poet, one of the breed who, wearing a dress coat and gray kid gloves, recite their ecstasies of love, their raptures, their despair, while leaning mournfully against a

mantelpiece, surrounded by women in evening clothes, listening entranced behind their fans.

With his vulgar but irresistible countenance, sunken eye, pallid complexion, hair cut short and mustaches stiffly waxed, Amaury might well have posed as a model of his kind. A desperate man such as women love, hopeless of life but irreproachably dressed, a lyric enthusiast, chilled and disheartened, in whom the madness of inspiration can be divined only in the loose and careless knotting of his cravat. And what success inevitably awaited him when he delivered in a strident voice a tirade from his poem "The Credo of Love," especially the verse ending in this extraordinary line: *I believe in love as I believe in God!*

Now I strongly suspect that the rascal cared as little for God as for anything else. But women do not look so closely. They are easily caught by a birdlime of words, and every time Amaury recited his "Credo of Love," you were certain to see all around the drawing-room rows and rows of little rosy mouths eagerly opening, ready to swallow the mawkish sentimentality. Think of it! A poet with such a beautiful mustache who believes in love as he believes in God!

For the nurseryman's wife this proved irresistible. In three sittings she was conquered. However, the poet declared in his "Credo" that he approved of only one way of erring—that which was openly declared, defying both law and society. So, taking "The Credo of Love" for her guide, the young woman one fine day escaped from the garden at



Auteuil and went to throw herself into her poet's arms. "I can no longer live with that man!" she told him. "Take me away!" In such cases the husband is always "that man," even if he be a horticulturist.

For a moment Amaury was staggered. How on earth could he have imagined that an ordinary little housewife of thirty would have taken a love poem so seriously and have followed its directions so literally? But he put the best face he could on his undeserved good fortune; and as the lady had, thanks to her little Auteuil garden, remained fresh and pretty, he ran away with her without a murmur.

For the first few days all was delightful. Fearing her husband would track them down, they hid under fictitious names, changed hotels, inhabited the most remote quarters of the town. Oh, wonderful power of romance! The more precautions, window blinds, and lowered veils appeared necessary, the greater her poet seemed to her. At night they opened the little window of their room and, gazing at the stars rising on high above the signal lights of the neighboring railway, she made him repeat again and again his wonderful verse: "I believe in love as I believe in God."

It was delightful; but unfortunately it did not last. The husband left them too undisturbed. As a matter of fact, the horticulturist was also a philosopher. His wife gone, he closed the green door of his oasis and quietly set about trimming his roses again, happy in the thought

that at least these were attached to the soil by long roots, and would not be able to run away from him.

Presently our lovers returned to Paris. Immediately the young woman felt that some change had come over her poet. Their flight, their fear of detection, their constant alarms—all the things which had fed her passion—existed no longer. She began to understand the real situation much more clearly. Moreover, as the couple went about setting up their little household, the poet began to reveal his true nature completely. The few generous, heroic, and delicate feelings he possessed were all spun into his verses, and he kept none for his personal use. He was mean, selfish, and above all niggardly. Soon he cut off his mustaches. How different he now looked from the fine gloomy fellow he had been as he declaimed his "Credo" in the blaze of two chandeliers!

Now he gave way to all his crotchets, the greatest of which was fancying himself always ill. Indeed, from constantly playing at sickness, one ends in being sick. He wrapped himself up in his plasters and covered his chimney piece with all manner of phials and powders.

For a while the little woman took her duties as a nurse quite seriously, for they gave her life some purpose But soon she tired of it. Closeted in the stuffy room beside her flannel-wrapped poet, she could not help dreaming of her sweetly scented little garden. And in her mind's eye, she could see the figure of her kind nurseryman husband, working in the midst of his shrubs. How simple, touching, and disin-

terested he appeared, compared with this exacting and egotistical poet!

By the end of a month she loved her husband,—really *loved* him,—not with the affection induced by habit, but with a real and ardent love. One day she wrote him a long letter full of passion and repentance. But he did not reply. Perhaps he thought she was not yet sufficiently punished. She wrote a second letter, humbled herself, begged him to permit her to return to him, saying that she would rather die than continue to live with that man. Now her lover was "that man"! Curiously, she hid herself from the poet while she wrote the letters, believing him still to be in love with her. "He will never allow me to leave," she told herself.

Thus it was that when, by dint of supplications, she obtained forgiveness, and the nurseryman—I have already mentioned that he was a philosopher—consented to take her back, the return to her home bore all the mysterious and dramatic aspect of flight.

She literally eloped with her husband. It was her last culpable pleasure. One evening when the poet, tired of their life together and proud of his regrown mustaches, had gone to an evening party to recite his "Credo of Love," she jumped into a cab and returned with her old husband to the little garden, forever cured of her ambition to be the wife of a poet.

It is true that this fellow was not much of a poet.



The Two Inns

IT WAS WHILE ON MY WAY home from Nîmes, one afternoon in July. The heat was overwhelming. As far as the eye could reach, the white, scorching, dusty road ran between gardens of olives and little oaks, beneath a great sun of dead silver which filled the whole sky. There was not a patch of shade or a breath of wind,—nothing but the quivering of the hot air and the strident voice of the cicadæ,—a mad, deafening music in hurried time, which seems the very voice of this immense luminous vibration. I had been walking through a desert for two hours, when suddenly before me a group of houses detached itself from the dust of the road. It was what they call "the St. Vincent relay"—four or five farms, long barns with red roofs, a waterless drinking-trough in a clump of scraggy fig-trees, and, at the end of the village, two large inns staring at each other from opposite sides of the road.

There was something striking in the propinquity of these inns. On the one side was a large, new building, full of life and animation, with every door open, the diligence before it, the smoking horses being unharnessed, the travelers who had dismounted drinking hurriedly in

the road in the scanty shadow of the walls. The courtyard was crowded with mules and carts, and wagoners lay beneath the mangers awaiting the cool of the evening. Within were cries, oaths, the pounding of fists on tables, the clink of glasses, the click of billiards, lemonade corks popping, and, dominating all this uproar, a joyful, resonant voice, which sang so that the windows rattled,—

La belle Margoton
Tant matin s'est levée,
A pris son broc d'argent,
A l'eau s'en est allée.

The inn opposite, on the other hand, was silent and as if abandoned. There was grass beneath the archway, the shutters were broken, over the door a faded branch of holly hung down like an old plume, and the doorsteps were propped up with stones from the road. It was all so poor and pitiful that it seemed really a charity to stop there to drink a glass.

When I entered I found a long room, deserted and dismal, which the dazzling sunlight from three large, curtainless windows caused to appear still more dismal and deserted. A few halting tables on which stood dusty glasses, a broken billiard-table which stretched forth its four pockets like alms-basins, a yellow divan, and an old desk slept there in an unwholesome and heavy heat. And the flies, the flies! Never had I seen so many,—on the ceiling, glued to the windows, in the

glasses, in clusters. When I opened the door, there was a buzzing and a whir of wings, as though I had been entering a beehive.

At the end of the room, in the recess of a window, a woman was standing close to the glass, busily occupied in looking out. I called twice,—

"Here, hostess!"

She turned about slowly, and showed me the commonplace face of a peasant, wrinkled, pitted, earth-colored, framed in a cap of reddish lace such as is worn with us by old women. She was not, however, an old woman; but tears had quite faded her.

"What do you wish?" she asked me, wiping her eyes.

"To sit down and drink something."

She looked at me greatly astonished, without moving from her place, as though she did not understand me.

"Is not this an inn?"

The woman sighed.

"Yes, it is an inn, if you like-- But why do you not go opposite, like the rest? It is much more gay."

"It is too gay for me. I prefer to remain here."

When she was quite sure that I was speaking seriously, the hostess began to come and go with a very busy air, opening drawers, rattling bottles, wiping glasses, and disturbing the flies. One could feel that serving this traveler was a real event. Once in a while the poor woman



would stop and take her head in her hands, as though she despaired of comprehending it.

Then she passed into the room behind. I could hear her rattling the keys, working at the locks, feeling in the bread-box, blowing, dusting, washing plates. Now and then I would hear a heavy sigh or a half-stifled sob.

After a quarter of an hour of this, I had before me a plate of *passerilles* (raisins), an old loaf from Beaucaire, as hard as sandstone, and a bottle of the sourest kind of wine.

"You are served," said the strange creature; and she hastily returned to her place before the window.

As I drank, I tried to make her talk.

"You do not often have customers, do you, my poor woman?"

"Oh, no, sir, never any one! When we were alone in the village, it was different; we had the relays, the meals for hunters during the teal season, and wagons the year around. But since our neighbors have settled here we have lost everything. People prefer to go opposite. They find it too gloomy here. The truth is that the house is not very agreeable. I am not handsome, I have the fever, and my two little girls are dead. Over there, on the contrary, they are always laughing. It is an Arlesian woman who keeps the inn,—a handsome woman who wears lace and three turns of a gold chain about her neck. The conductor, who is her lover, takes her the diligence; and besides she has a lot of wheedling girls for chambermaids. Consequently, no end of business

comes to her. She has all the young men of Bezouces, of Redessan, of Jonquières. The wagoners go out of their way to stop at her house. As for me, I remain here all the day, without any one, eating my heart out."

She said this in a listless, indifferent voice, with her forehead always pressed against the glass. There was evidently something in the inn opposite which held her attention.

Suddenly there was a great bustle on the other side of the street. The diligence started off in the dust. We could hear the cracking of the whips, the postilion's fanfares, and the maids who had run to the door, crying,—"*Adiousias! Adiousias!*" and over all the formidable voice heard a few moments before, singing louder than ever,—

A pris son broc d'argent,
A l'eau s'en est allée;
De là n'a vu venir
Trois chevaliers d'armée.

At this voice the hostess shivered from head to foot, and, turning to me, said in a low voice,—

"Do you hear? It is my husband. Does he not sing well?"

I looked at her in amazement.

"What? Your husband? So he goes there too?"

Then she replied, with a heart-broken look but very gently,—

"What can you expect, sir? Men are like that,—they do not care

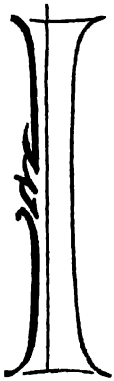
to see one weep, and I do nothing but weep since the death of my little girls. And then it is so lonely in this great barrack, where there is never any one. So, when he is too dreary, my poor José goes opposite to drink; and as he has a fine voice, the Arlesian woman makes him sing. Hush! he is beginning again."

And trembling, with outstretched hands and great tears which made her still uglier, she stood there before the window, as if in ecstasy, listening to her José singing for the Arlesian woman—

Le premier lui a dit
"Bonjour, belle mignonne!"



The Last Lesson



STARTED FOR SCHOOL very late that morning and was in great dread of a scolding, especially because M. Hamel had said that he would question us on participles, and I did not know the first word about them. For a moment I thought of running away and spending the day out of doors. It was so warm, so bright! The birds were chirping at the edge of the woods; and in the open field back of the sawmill the Prussian soldiers were drilling. It was all much more tempting than the rule for participles, but I had the strength to resist, and hurried off to school.

When I passed the town hall there was a crowd in front of the bulletin board. For the last two years all our bad news had come from there—the lost battles, the draft, the orders of the commanding officer—and I thought to myself, without stopping:

"What can be the matter now?"

Then, as I hurried by as fast as I could go, the blacksmith, Wachter, who was there, with his apprentice, reading the bulletin, called after me:

"Don't go so fast, bub; you'll get to your school in plenty of time!"

I thought he was making fun of me, and reached M. Hamel's little garden all out of breath.

Usually, when school began, there was a great bustle, which could be heard out in the street, the opening and closing of desks, lessons repeated in unison, very loud, with our hands over our ears to understand better, and the teacher's great ruler rapping on the table. But now it was all so still! I had counted on the commotion to get to my desk without being seen; but, of course, that day everything had to be as quiet as Sunday morning. Through the window I saw my classmates, already in their places, and M. Hamel walking up and down with his terrible iron ruler under his arm. I had to open the door and go in before everybody. You can imagine how I blushed and how frightened I was.

But nothing happened. M. Hamel saw me and said very kindly:

"Go to your place quickly, little Franz. We were beginning without you."

I jumped over the bench and sat down at my desk. Not till then, when I had got a little over my fright, did I see that our teacher had on his beautiful green coat, his frilled shirt, and the little black silk cap, all embroidered, that he never wore except on inspection and prize days. Besides, the whole school seemed so strange and solemn. But the thing that surprised me most was to see, on the back benches that were always empty, the village people sitting quietly like ourselves; old Hauser, with his three-cornered hat, the former mayor, the former

postmaster, and several others besides. Everybody looked sad; and Hauser had brought an old primer, thumbed at the edges, and he held it open on his knees with his great spectacles lying across the pages.

While I was wondering about it all, M. Hamel mounted his chair, and, in the same grave and gentle tone which he had used to me, he said:

"My children, this is the last lesson I shall give you. The order has come from Berlin to teach only German in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine. The new master comes to-morrow. This is your last French lesson. I want you to be very attentive."

What a thunder-clap these words were to me!

Oh, the wretches; that was what they had put up at the town hall!

My last French lesson! Why, I hardly knew how to write! I should never learn any more! I must stop there, then! Oh, how sorry I was for not learning my lessons, for seeking birds' eggs, or going sliding on the Soar! My books, that had seemed such a nuisance a while ago, so heavy to carry, my grammar, and my history of the saints, were old friends now that I couldn't give up. And M. Hamel, too; the idea that he was going away, that I should never see him again, made me forget all about his ruler and how cranky he was.

Poor man! It was in honor of this last lesson that he had put on his fine Sunday-clothes, and now I understood why the old men of the village were sitting there in the back of the room. It was because they were sorry, too, that they had not gone to school more. It was their way of thanking our master for his forty years of faithful service and of



showing their respect for the country that was theirs no more.

While I was thinking of all this, I heard my name called. It was my turn to recite. What would I not have given to be able to say that dreadful rule for the participle all through, very loud and clear, and without one mistake? But I got mixed up on the first words and stood there, holding on to my desk, my heart beating, and not daring to look up. I heard M. Hamel say to me:

"I won't scold you, little Franz: you must feel bad enough. See how it is! Every day we have said to ourselves: 'Bah! I've plenty of time. I'll learn it to-morrow.' And now you see where we've come out. Ah, that's the great trouble with Alsace; she puts off learning till to-morrow. Now those fellows out there will have the right to say to you: 'How is it; you pretend to be Frenchmen, and yet you can neither speak nor write your own language?' But you are not the worst, poor little Franz. We've all a great deal to reproach ourselves with.

"Your parents were not anxious enough to have you learn. They preferred to put you to work on a farm or at the mills, so as to have a little more money. And I? I've been to blame also. Have I not often sent you to water my flowers instead of learning your lessons? And when I wanted to go fishing, did I not just give you a holiday?"

Then, from one thing to another, M. Hamel went on to talk of the French language, saying that it was the most beautiful language in the world—the clearest, the most logical; that we must guard it among us and never forget it, because when a people are enslaved, as long as they

hold fast to their language it is as if they had the key to their prison. Then he opened a grammar and read us our lesson. I was amazed to see how well I understood it. All he said seemed so easy, so easy! I think, too, that I had never listened so carefully, and that he had never explained everything with so much patience. It seemed almost as if the poor man wanted to give us all he knew before going away, and to put it all into our heads at one stroke.

After the grammar, we had a lesson in writing. That day M. Hamel had new copies for us, written in a beautiful round hand: France, Alsace, France, Alsace. They looked like little flags floating everywhere in the school-room, hung from the rod at the top of our desks. You ought to have seen how every one set to work, and how quiet it was! The only sound was the scratching of the pens over the paper. Once some beetles flew in; but nobody paid any attention to them, not even the littlest ones, who worked right on tracing their fish-hooks, as if that was French, too. On the roof the pigeons cooed very low, and I thought to myself:

"Will they make them sing in German, even the pigeons?"

Whenever I looked up from my writing I saw M. Hamel sitting motionless in his chair and gazing first at one thing, then at another, as if he wanted to fix in his mind just how everything looked in that little school-room. Fancy! For forty years he had been there in the same place, with his garden outside the window and his class in front of him, just like that. Only the desks and benches had been worn smooth; the

walnut-trees in the garden were taller, and the hop-vine that he had planted himself twined about the windows to the roof. How it must have broken his heart to leave it all, poor man; to hear his sister moving about in the room above, packing their trunks! For they must leave the country next day.

But he had the courage to hear every lesson to the very last. After the writing, we had a lesson in history, and then the babies chanted their ba, be, bi, bo, bu. Down there at the back of the room old Hauser had put on his spectacles and, holding his primer in both hands, spelled the letters with them. You could see that he, too, was crying; his voice trembled with emotion, and it was so funny to hear him that we all wanted to laugh and cry. Ah, how well I remember it, that last lesson!

All at once the church-clock struck twelve. Then the Angelus. At the same moment the trumpets of the Prussians, returning from drill, sounded under our windows. M. Hamel stood up, very pale, in his chair. I never saw him look so tall.

"My friends," said he, "I— —" But something choked him. He could not go on.

Then he turned to the blackboard, took a piece of chalk, and, bearing on with all his might, he wrote as large as he could:

"VIVE LA FRANCE!"

Then he stopped and leaned his head against the wall, and without a word, he made a gesture to us with his hand:

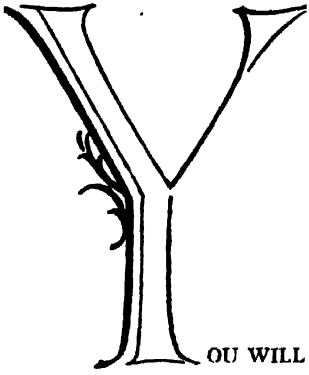
"School is dismissed—you may go."



M. Seguin's Goat

TO M. PIERRE GRINGOIRE,

LYRIC POET IN PARIS



OU WILL ALWAYS be the same, my poor Gringoire!

What! a place is offered you as reporter on one of the best Parisian newspapers, and you have the coolness to refuse it? Look at yourself, you luckless fellow! Look at your shabby jacket, those dilapidated breeches, and that thin face that cries out hunger. It is to this that your passion for noble verse has brought you! This is what your loyal ten years' service as page to Sire Apollo has won! On the whole, are you not ashamed of it?

Come, make yourself a reporter, imbecile; make yourself a reporter. You will earn good crown-pieces, and have your knife and fork at Brébant's, and you can exhibit yourself on all first nights with a new feather in your cap.

No? What, you won't? You insist on living free and as you please to the end of the chapter? Well, then! listen to the history of M. Seguin's goat. You will see what is gained by wishing to live at liberty.

M. Seguin never had luck with his goats. He lost them in all kinds

of ways. One fine morning they broke their tether and wandered away to the mountain, where a wolf ate them. Neither the caresses of their master nor fear of the wolf, nothing could restrain them. They were, it appeared, independent goats, wanting at any cost free air and liberty.

The worthy M. Seguin, who did not understand the nature of his animals, was shocked. He said:

"That's enough; goats are bored by living with me; I won't keep another."

However, after losing six in that way, he was not discouraged, and he bought a seventh; but this time he was careful to get her quite young, so young that she might the better get accustomed to live with him.

Ah! Gringoire, she was pretty, that little goat of M. Seguin's, so pretty with her soft eyes, her little tuft of beard like a sub-officer, her black and shiny hoofs, her ribbed horns, and her long, white hair which wrapped her like a mantle! She was almost as charming as that kid of Esmeralda's—you remember, Gringoire?—and then, so docile, so coaxing, letting herself be milked without budging, and never putting her foot in the bowl! A love of a little goat!

Behind M. Seguin's house was a field hedged round with hawthorn. It was there that he put his new boarder. He fastened her to a stake, at the very best part of the meadow, taking care to give her plenty of rope; and from time to time he went to see if she was satisfied. The goat seemed very happy, and cropped the grass with such heartiness that M. Seguin was delighted.

"At last," thought the poor man, "here's one at least that isn't bored by living with me!"

M. Seguin deceived himself; the goat was bored.

One day she said to herself, looking at the mountain:

"How nice it must be up there! What a pleasure to skip in the heather, without this cursed rope, which rubs my neck! It is all very well for asses and cattle to browse in a field, but goats! why, *they* want the open."

From that moment the grass of the meadow seemed to her insipid. Ennui seized her. She grew thin; her milk was scanty. It was really piteous to see her, straining at the tether all day, her head turned to the mountain, her nostrils flaming, and she saying "Ma-ë" so sadly.

M. Seguin saw that something was the matter with his goat, but he did not know what. One morning, after he had milked her, the goat turned round and said to him in her patois:—

"Listen, M. Seguin; I am so weary here with you; let me go to the mountain."

"Ah! *mon Dieu!* She, too!" cried poor M. Seguin, stupefied, and he let fall the bowl; then, sitting down on the grass at the side of his goat, he said:—

"Oh! Blanchette, would you leave me?"

And Blanchette answered:—

"Yes, M. Seguin."

"Isn't there grass enough here to please you?"

"Oh! plenty, M. Seguin."

"Do I tie you too short? Shall I lengthen the rope?"

"It isn't worth while, M. Seguin."

"Then what is the matter? What do you want?"

"I want to go on the mountain, M. Seguin."

"But, you unhappy little thing, don't you know there are wolves on the mountain? What would you do if a wolf attacked you?"

"I'd butt him with my horns."

"A wolf wouldn't care for your horns. He has eaten up goats of mine with much bigger horns than yours. Don't you remember that poor old Renaude who was here last year? Strong and spiteful as a ram. She fought all night with the wolf, but, in the morning, the wolf ate her."

"*Pecaire!* Poor Renaude! But that does not matter, M. Seguin; let me go to the mountain."

"Merciful powers!" exclaimed M. Seguin, "what *is* the matter with my goats? Another one for the wolf to eat! Well, no, I shall save you in spite of yourself, you slut! and for fear you should break your rope I shall put you in the stable, and there you will stay."

Whereupon M. Seguin led the goat into his brand-new stable, and double-locked the door. Unfortunately, he forgot the window, and hardly had he turned his back before the little one was out and away.

You laugh, Gringoire? *Parbleu!* I suppose so; you take the side of

the goat against that good M. Seguin. We'll see if you laugh presently.

When the white goat reached the mountain there was general delight. Never had the old fir-trees seen anything so pretty. They received her like a little princess. The chestnut-trees bent to the ground to kiss her with the tips of their branches. The golden gorse opened wide to let her pass, and smelt just as sweet as it could. In fact, the whole mountain welcomed her.

You can imagine, Gringoire, how happy she was! No more rope, no stake, nothing to prevent her from skipping and browsing as she pleased. My dear fellow, the grass was above her horns! and such grass! —luscious, delicate, toothsome, made of all sorts of plants. Quite another thing from that grass in the meadow. And the flowers, oh! great blue campanulas and crimson fox-gloves with their long calyxes, a perfect forest of wild-flowers giving out an intoxicating sweetness.

The white goat, a little tipsy, wallowed in the thick of them with her legs in the air, and rolled down the banks pell-mell with the falling leaves and the chestnuts. Then, suddenly, she sprang to her feet with a bound, and hop! away she went, head foremost, through thicket and bushes, now on a rock, now in a gully, up there, down there, everywhere. You would have said that ten of M. Seguin's goats were on the mountain.

The fact is, Blanchette was afraid of nothing.

She sprang with a bound over torrents that spattered her as she passed with a dust of damp spray. Then, all dripping, she would stretch

herself out on a nice flat rock and dry in the sun. Once, coming to the edge of a slope with a bit of laurel between her teeth, she saw below, far below on the plain, the house of M. Seguin with the meadow behind it; and she laughed till she cried.

"How small it is!" she said; "how could I ever have lived there?"

Poor little thing! being perched so high she fancied she was tall as the world.

Well! it was a good day for M. Seguin's goat. About noon, running from right to left, she fell in with a herd of chamois munching a wild vine with all their teeth. Among them our little white-gowned rover made quite a sensation. They gave her the choicest place at the vine, and all those gentlemen were very gallant. In fact, it appears—but this is between ourselves, Gringoire—that a young chamois with a black coat had the great good fortune to please Blanchette. The pair wandered off in the woods for an hour or so, and if you want to know what they said to each other, go ask those chattering brooks that are running invisible through the mosses.

Suddenly the wind freshened. The mountain grew violet; it was dusk.

"Already!" said the little goat; and she stopped, quite surprised.

Below, the fields were drowned in mist. M. Seguin's meadow disappeared in the fog, and nothing could be seen of the house but the roof and a trifle of smoke. She heard the little bells of a flock that was on its way home, and her soul grew sad. A falcon, making for his nest,

swept her with his wings as he passed. She shuddered. Then came a howl on the mountain:

"Hoo! hoo!"

She thought of the wolf; all day that silly young thing had never once thought of it. At the same moment a horn sounded far, far down the valley. It was that good M. Seguin, making a last effort.

"Hoo, hoo!" howled the wolf.

"Come back! come back!" cried the horn.

Blanchette felt a wish to return, but remembering the stake, the rope, the hedge of the field, she thought that she never could endure that life again and 'twas better to remain where she was.

The horn ceased to sound.

The goat heard behind her the rustling of leaves. She turned and saw in the shadow two short ears, erect, and two eyes shining. It was the wolf.

Enormous, motionless, seated on his tail, he was looking at the little white goat and smacking his lips in advance. As he knew very well he should eat her up, the wolf was not in a hurry; but when she turned round and saw him he began to laugh wickedly: "Ha! ha! M. Seguin's little goat!—" and he licked his great red tongue round his wily chops.

Blanchette felt she was lost. For an instant, remembering the story of old Renaude, who had fought all night only to be eaten in the morning, she said to herself that 'twas better, perhaps, to be eaten at once;

but then, thinking otherwise, she put herself on guard, head low, horns forward, like the brave little goat that she was. Not that she had any hope of killing the wolf,—goats can't kill wolves,—but only to see if she, too, could hold out as long as old Renaude.

Then the monster advanced, and the pretty little horns began the dance.

Ah! the brave goatling! with what heart she went at it! More than ten times—I'm not exaggerating, Gringoire—more than ten times she forced the wolf back to get breath. During each of these momentary truces the dainty little thing nibbled one more blade of her dearly loved grass; then, with her mouth full, she returned to the combat. It lasted all through the night. From time to time M. Seguin's goat looked up at the stars as they danced on the cloudless sky and said to herself:—

"Oh! if I can only hold out till dawn."

One after another, the stars went out. Blanchette redoubled the blows of her horns, and the wolf the snap of his teeth. A pale gleam showed on the horizon. The hoarse crowing of a cock rose from a barnyard.

"At last!" said the poor little goat, who had only awaited the dawn to die; and she stretched herself out on the ground in her pretty white fur all spotted with gore.

Then the wolf fell upon her and ate her up.

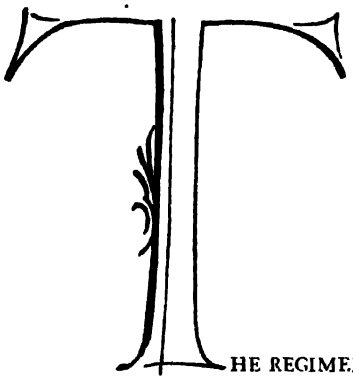
Adieu, Gringoire!

The story you have now heard is not a tale of my own invention. If ever you come to Provence, our farmers will often tell you of *la cabro de Moussu Seguin, que se battégue touto la neui emé lou loup, e piei lou matin lou loup la mangé.*

You understand me, Gringoire: "And then, in the morning, the wolf ate her up."



The Standard Bearer



HE REGIMENT was engaged on the banks of a railway, and served as a target to the whole Prussian army massed in an opposite wood. They were firing on each other at a distance of eighty yards. The officers shouted, "Lie down!" but no one would obey, and the proud regiment remained standing gathered round their colors. In the great horizon of the setting sun, of cornfields, of pasture land, this confused group of men, enveloped in smoke, were like a flock of sheep surprised in the open country by the first whirlwind of a terrific storm.

It rained iron on that slope! Nothing was heard but the crackle of the volleys and the prolonged vibration of the balls which flew from one end of the battle-field to the other. From time to time the flag, which waved overhead in the wind of the mitrailleuse, disappeared in the smoke, then a voice grave and steady, dominating the firing, the struggles of the dying, the oaths of the wounded, would cry: "To the flag, boys! to the flag!" Instantly an officer, vague as a shadow in the red mist, would spring forward, and the standard, once more alive as it were, showed again above the battle.

Twenty-two times it fell. Twenty-two times its staff, still warm, slipping from a dying hand, was seized and upheld, and when, at sunset, what remained of the regiment—scarce a handful of men—retreated slowly firing as they went, the colors were mere rags in the hands of Sergeant Hornus, the twenty-third standard bearer of the day.

Sergeant Hornus was a crusty old war-dog, who could hardly write his own name, and who had taken twenty years to gain his sergeant's stripes. All the miseries of a foundling, all the brutalizing effects of barracks-life, could be traced in the low projecting forehead, the back beneath the knapsack, that air of careless self-neglect acquired in the ranks.

Besides all this he stammered, but then eloquence is not essential to a standard bearer. On the evening of the battle, his colonel said to him, "You have the colors, my brave fellow; keep them." And on his coarse hood, frayed by war and weather, the vivandière stitched the gold band of a sub-lieutenant.

This had been the one ambition of his humble life. From that moment he drew himself up; he who was wont to walk with bent head and eyes fixed on the ground, henceforth looked proudly upwards to the bit of stuff which he held very straight high above death, treachery and defeat. Never was there a happier man than Hornus on days of battle, holding his staff firmly in its leather socket with both hands.

He neither spoke nor moved, and was as serious as a priest guarding some sacred thing. All his life, all his strength, were concentrated in

the fingers grasping that gilded rag upon which the balls beat so persistently, and in his defiant eyes looking the Prussians full in the face, as if saying, "Try, if you dare, to take it from me!"

No one did try, not even death.

After Borny, after Gravelotte, those murderous battles, the colors came out, tattered, in holes, transparent with wounds, but it was still old Hornus who carried them.

Then came September with the army around Metz, the investment, and that long pause when the cannon rusted in the mud, and the finest troops in the world, demoralized by inaction, want of food and want of news, died of fever and ennui beside their piled arms. No one, neither chiefs nor soldiers, had faith in the future; Hornus alone was still confident. His ragged *tricolor* was all in all to him, and as long as he could see that, nothing seemed lost.

Unfortunately, as there was no more fighting, the colonel kept the colors at his house in one of the suburbs of Metz, and poor Hornus was much like a mother whose child is out to nurse. He thought of it constantly. Then when the yearning was too much for him, he went off to Metz, and having seen it still in the same place, leaning against the wall, he returned full of courage and patience, bringing back to his dripping tent dreams of battle and of advancing marches, with flying colors floating over the Prussian trenches. An order of the day from Marshal Bazaine put an end to these illusions. One morning Hornus on awakening found the whole camp clamorous, groups of soldiers in great excite-

ment, uttering cries of rage, all shaking their fists towards one side of the town as though their anger were roused against some criminal. There were shouts of "Away with him!" "Let him be shot!" And the officers did nothing to prevent them. They kept apart with bent heads as if ashamed of being seen by their men. It was indeed shameful. The Marshal's order had just been read to 150,000 fighting men, well armed and efficient--an order which surrendered them to the enemy without a struggle!

"And the colors?" asked Hornus, growing pale. The colors were to be given up with the rest, with the arms, with what was left of the munitions of war—everything.

"*To . . . to . . . tonnerre de Dieu!*" stuttered the poor man. "They shan't have mine." And he started at a run towards the town.

Here also there was great disturbance: National Guards, civilians, *gardes mobiles* shouting and excited, depurations on their way to the Marshal; but of all this Hornus saw and heard nothing. All the way up the Rue du Faubourg he kept saying to himself:

"Take my flag from me indeed! It is not possible. They have no right to it! Let him give the Prussians what is his own, his gilded carriages, his fine plate brought from Mexico! But that, it is mine. It is my honor. I defy any one to touch it."

These fragments of speech were broken by his rapid pace and by his stammer but the old fellow had his idea notwithstanding; a very clear and defined idea—to get the standard, carry it to the regiment,

and cut his way through the Prussians with all who would follow him.

When he reached his destination he was not even allowed to enter the house. The colonel, furious himself, would see no one; but Hornus was not to be put off thus. He swore, shouted, hustled the orderly!

"My flag, I want my flag." At last a window opened.

"Is it you, Hornus?"

"Yes, Colonel; I——"

"The colors are all at the arsenal—you have only to go there and you will get an acknowledgment."

"An acknowledgment! What for?"

"It is the Marshal's order."

"But, Colonel——"

"Leave me alone," and the window was shut.

Old Hornus staggered like a drunken man.

"An acknowledgment, an acknowledgment," he repeated mechanically, moving slowly away, comprehending only one thing, that the flag was at the arsenal, and that he must get it again, no matter at what price.

The gates of the arsenal were wide open, to allow the passage of the Prussian wagons which were drawn up in the yard. Hornus shuddered. All the other ensigns were there, fifty or sixty officers silent and sorrowful; those sombre carts in the rain, with the men grouped bareheaded behind them, had all the aspect of a funeral.

In a corner the colors of Bazaine's army lay in a confused heap on

the muddy pavement. Nothing could be sadder than these bits of gay-colored silks, these ends of gold fringe and of ornamented hafts, all this glorious paraphernalia thrown on the ground, soiled by rain and mud. An officer took them one by one, and as each regiment was named, its ensign advanced to receive an acknowledgment. Two Prussian officers, stiff and unmoved, superintended the ceremony.

And must you go thus, oh sacred and glorious flags!—displaying your brave rents, sweeping the ground sadly like broken-winged birds, with the shame of beautiful things sullied? With each of you goes a part of France. The sun of long marches hid in your faded folds. In each mark of a ball you kept the memory of the unknown dead falling at random around the standard, the enemy's mark!

"Hornus, it is your turn, they are calling you; go for your receipt."

What did he care about a receipt?

The flag was there before him. It was his, the most beautiful, the most mutilated of all. And seeing it again, he fancied himself once more on that railway bank. He heard the whistling balls and the colonel's voice, "To the flag, boys!" He saw his twenty two comrades lying dead; himself, the twenty-third, rushing forward in his turn to support the poor flag which sank for want of an arm. Ah! that day he had sworn to defend it to the death—and now!

Thinking of all this made his heart's blood rush to his head. Distracted, mad, he sprang on the Prussian officer, tore from him his beloved standard, tried to raise it once more straight and high, crying "To

the f—." But the words stuck in his throat—he felt the staff tremble, slip through his hands. In that paralyzing atmosphere, that atmosphere of death which weighs so heavily on capitulated towns, the standard could no longer float, nothing glorious could live, and old Hornus, too, choked with shame and rage, fell dead.



Aged Folk



LETTER, Père Azan?"

"Yes, monsieur; and it comes from Paris."

He was quite proud, that worthy old Azan, that it came from Paris. I was not. Something told me that the Parisian missive from the Rue Jean-Jacques, dropping thus upon my table unexpectedly, and so early in the morning, would make me lose my whole day. I was not mistaken,—and you shall see why.

"You must do me a service, my friend," said the letter. "Close your mill for a day, and go to Eyguières. Eyguières is a large village three or four leagues from your mill,—a pleasant walk. When you get there, ask for the Orphans' Convent. Enter without knocking—the door is always open—and, as you enter, call out very loud: 'Good day, worthy people! I am a friend of Maurice!' On which you will see two little old persons—oh! but old, old, ever so old—stretching out their hands to you from their big armchairs; and you are to kiss them for me, with all your heart, as if they were yours, your own friends. Then you will talk. They will talk to you of me, and nothing else; they will say a lot of

foolish things, which you are to listen to without laughing. You won't laugh, will you? They are my grandparents; two beings whose very life I am, and who have not seen me these ten years. . . . Ten years—a long time! But how can I help it? Paris clutches me. And they, they are so old that if they came to see me they would break to bits on the way. . . . Happily, you are there, my dear miller, and, in kissing you, these poor old people will fancy they are kissing me. I have so often told them about you, and of the good friendship that. . . ."

The devil take good friendship! Just this very morning, when the weather is so beautiful! But not at all fit to tramp along the roads; too much mistral, too much sun—a regular Provence day. When that cursed letter came I had just picked out my shelter between two rocks, where I dreamed of staying all day like a lizard, drinking light and listening to the song of the pines. Well, I could not help myself. I shut up the mill, grumbling, and hid the key. My stick, my pipe, and off I went.

I reached Eyguières in about two hours. The village was deserted; everybody was in the fields From the elms in the courtyards, white with dust, the grasshoppers were screaming. To be sure, in the square before the mayor's office, a donkey was sunning himself, and a flock of pigeons were dabbling in the fountain before the church, but no one able to show me the Orphans' Convent. Happily, an old witch suddenly appeared, crouching and knitting in the angle of her doorway. I

told her what I was looking for, and, as she was a witch of very great power, she had only to raise her distaff and behold! the Orphans' Convent rose up before me. It was a large, sullen, black house, proud of exhibiting above its arched portal an old cross of red freestone with Latin around it. Beside this house I saw another, very small; gray shutters, garden behind it. I knew it directly, and I entered without knocking.

All my life I shall remember that long, cool, quiet corridor, the walls rose-tinted, the little garden quivering at the other end, seen through a thin blind. It seemed to me that I was entering the house of some old bailiff of the olden time of Sedaine. At the end of the passage, on the left, through a half-opened door, I heard the tick-tack of a large clock and the voice of a child—a child in school—who was reading aloud, and pausing at each syllable: "Then—Saint—I-re-ne-us—cried—out—I—am—the—wheat—of—the—Lord—I must—be--ground—by—the—teeth—of—these an-i-mals." I softly approached the door and looked in.

In the quiet half-light of a little room an old, old man with rosy cheeks, wrinkled to the tips of his fingers, sat sleeping in a chair, his mouth open, his hands on his knees. At his feet a little girl dressed in blue—with a great cape and a linen cap, the orphans' costume—was reading the life of Saint Irenæus in a book that was bigger than herself. The reading had operated miraculously on the entire household. The old man slept in his chair, the flies on the ceiling, the canaries in their

cage at the window; and the great clock snored: tick-tack, tick-tack. Nothing was awake in the room but a broad band of light which came, straight and white, between the closed shutters, full of lively sparkles and microscopic whirlings.

Amid this general somnolence, the child went gravely on with her reading:

"Im me-di-ate-ly — two — li-ons — dart-ed — up-on — him — and —ate—him—up." At this moment I entered the room. The lions of Saint Irenæus, darting into the room, could not have produced greater stupefaction. A regular stage effect! The little one gave a cry, the big book fell, the flies and the canaries woke, the clock struck, the old man started up, quite frightened, and I myself, being rather troubled, stopped short on the sill of the door, and called out very loud: "Good day, worthy people! I am Maurice's friend."

Oh, then! if you had only seen him, that old man, if you had only seen how he came to me with outstretched arms, embracing me, pressing my hands, and wandering about the room, crying out:

"Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!"

All the wrinkles of his face were laughing. He was red; he stuttered:

"Ah! monsieur—Ah! monsieur."

Then he went to the back of the room and called: "Mamette!"

A door opened, a trot of mice in the corridor—it was Mamette. Nothing prettier than that little old woman with her mob-cap, her

brown gown, and the embroidered handkerchief which she held in her hand in the olden fashion. Most affecting thing! The two were like each other. With a false front and yellow bows to his cap, he too might be called Mamette. Only, the real Mamette must have wept a great deal in her life, for she was even more wrinkled than he. Like him, she too had an orphan with her, a little nurse in a blue cape who never left her; and to see these old people protected by those orphans was indeed the most touching thing you can imagine.

On entering, Mamette began to make me a deep courtesy, but a word of the old man stopped her in the middle of it:

"A friend of Maurice."

Instantly she trembled, she wept, dropped her handkerchief, grew red, very red, redder than he. Those aged folk, who have hardly a drop of blood in their veins, how it flies to their faces at the least emotion!

"Quick, quick! a chair," said the old lady to her little girl.

"Open the shutters," said the old man to his.

Then, taking me each by a hand, they led me, trotting along, to the window, the better to see me. The armchairs were placed; I sat between the two on a stool, the little Blues behind us, and the questioning began:

"How is he? What is he doing? Why doesn't he come? Is he happy?"

Patati-patata! and so for two hours.

I answered as best I could all their questions, giving such details



about my friend as I knew, and boldly inventing others that I did not know; being careful to avoid admitting that I had never noticed whether his windows closed tightly, and what colored paper he had on his wall.

"The paper of his bedroom? Blue, madam, light blue, with garlands of flowers."

"Really!" said the old lady, much affected; then she added, turning to her husband, "He is such a dear lad!"

"Yes, yes, a dear lad," said the other with enthusiasm.

And all the time that I was speaking they kept up between them little nods and sly laughs and winks, and knowing looks; or else the old man came closer to say in my ear:

"Speak louder! She is a little hard of hearing."

And she on her side:

"A little louder if you please. He doesn't hear very well."

Then I raised my voice and both of them thanked me with a smile; and in those faded smiles,—bending toward me, seeking in the depths of my eyes the image of their Maurice,—I was, myself, quite moved to see that image vague, veiled, almost imperceptible, as if I beheld my friend smiling to me from afar through a mist.

Suddenly the old man sat upright in his chair.

"I have just thought, Mamette—perhaps he has not breakfasted!"

And Mamette, distressed, throws up her arms.

"Not breakfasted! Oh, heavens!"

I thought they were all talking of Maurice, and I was about to say that that worthy lad never waited later than noon for his breakfast. But no, it was of me they were thinking; and it was indeed a sight to see their commotion when I had to own that I was still fasting.

"Quick! set the table, little Blues! That table in the middle of the room—the Sunday cloth—the flowered plates. And no laughing, if you please. Make haste, make haste!"

And haste they made. Only time to break three plates and breakfast was served.

"A good little breakfast," said Mamette, leading me to the table. "Only, you must eat it alone. We have eaten already."

Poor old people! At whatever hour you took them they had "eaten already."

Mamette's good little breakfast was a cup of milk, dates, and a *barquette,* a kind of shortcake, no doubt enough to feed her canaries for a week; and to think that I, alone, I ate up all their provisions! I felt the indignation around the table. The little Blues whispered and nudged each other; and those canaries in their cage,—I knew they were saying: "Oh! that monsieur, he is eating up the whole of the *barquette!*"

I did eat it all, truly, almost without perceiving that I did so, preoccupied as I was by looking round that bright and placid room where floated, as it were, the fragrance of things ancient. Especially noticeable were two little beds from which I could not detach my eyes. Those

beds, almost two cradles, I pictured them in the morning at dawn, still enclosed within their great fringed curtains. Three o'clock strikes. That is the hour when old people wake.

"Are you asleep, Mamette?"

"No, my friend."

"Isn't Maurice a fine lad?"

"Yes, yes, a fine lad."

And from that I imagined a long conversation by merely looking at the little beds of the two old people, standing side by side.

During this time a terrible drama was going on at the other end of the room before a closet. It concerned reaching up to the top shelf for a certain bottle of brandied cherries which had awaited Maurice's return for the last ten years. The old people now proposed to open it for me. In spite of Mamette's supplications, the husband was determined to get the cherries himself, and, mounted on a chair, to the terror of his wife, he was striving to reach them. You can see the scene from here: The old man trembling on the tips of his toes, the little Blues clinging to his chair. Mamette behind him, breathless, her arms extending, and, pervading all, the slight perfume of bergamot exhaled from the open closet, and the great piles of unbleached linen therein contained. It was charming.

At last, after many efforts, they succeeded in getting it from the closet, that famous bottle, and with it an old silver cup, Maurice's cup

when he was little. This they filled with cherries to the brim—Maurice was so fond of cherries! And while the old man served them he whispered in my ear as if his mouth watered,—

"You are very lucky, you, to be the one to eat them. My wife put them up. You'll taste something good."

Alas! his wife had put them up, but she had forgotten to sweeten them. They were atrocious, your cherries, my poor Mamette—but that did not prevent me from eating them all without blinking.

The meal over, I rose to take leave of my hosts. They would fain have kept me longer to talk of that dear lad, but the day was shortening, the mill was far, and I had to go.

The old man rose when I did.

"Mamette, my coat; I will accompany him as far as the square."

I felt very sure that in her heart Mamette thought it too cool for the old man to be out, but she did not show it. Only, as she helped him to put his arms into the sleeves of his coat, a handsome snuff-colored coat with mother-of-pearl buttons, I heard the dear creature say to him softly:

"You won't be late, will you?"

And he, with a roguish air,—

"Hey! hey! I don't know—perhaps not."

Thereupon they looked at each other, laughing, and the little Blues laughed to see them laugh, and the canaries laughed too, in their

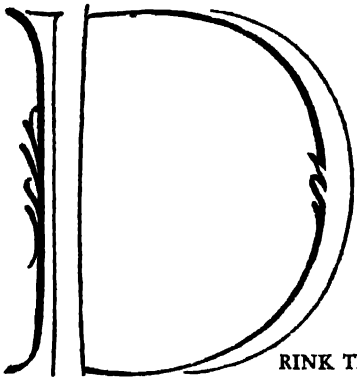
cage, after their fashion. Between ourselves, I think the smell of those cherries had made them all a little tipsy.

Daylight was fading as we left the house, grandpapa and I. A little Blue followed him at a distance to bring him back; but he did not see her, and seemed quite proud to walk along, arm in arm with me, like a man. Mamette, beaming, watched us from the sill of her door with pretty little nods of her head, that seemed to say:

"See there! my poor man, he can still walk about!"



The Elixir of Father Gaucher



RINK THIS, neighbor, and tell me the news."

Drop by drop, with the scrupulous care of a lapidary counting his pearls, the curé of Graveson poured me a little of a green, golden, warm, sparkling, exquisite liquid. It made my stomach all sunshine.

"This is Father Gaucher's elixir, the joy and health of our Provence," said the good man, with an air of triumph. "It is made at the Monastery of the Prémontrés, two leagues from your mill. Is it not worth all the Chartreuse in the world? And if you knew the history of this elixir! Listen, while I tell you."

Then very simply, without any intent of malice on his part, the abbé began in the vicarage dining-room, so pure and calm, with its little pictures of the Stations of the Cross, and the pretty, light curtains starched like surplices, the following narrative, a trifle irreverent. it must be admitted, somewhat in the style of Erasmus or D'Assoucy:

TWENTY YEARS AGO the Prémontrés, or, rather, the White Fathers, as our Provençals call them, had sunk into such abject poverty that your

heart would have ached could you have seen their house at that time. The great wall and the Pacôme tower were crumbling to pieces; all around the cloister the place was overgrown with weeds; the colonettes were cracking; the stone saints tottered in their niches; the wind from the Rhone whistled through the chapels, blowing out the candles, breaking the lead of the windows, and whipping the holy water out of the fonts. But saddest of all, the bell-tower was silent as a deserted pigeon-house; they had no money to buy a bell, and the fathers had to ring for matins with snappers of almond-wood.

Poor White Fathers! I see them yet in the procession of the Fête-Dieu, walking along in their patched capes, pale and cadaverous (their only food was lemons and watermelons), Monseigneur the abbé bringing up the rear with bowed head, ashamed to hold up to the light the worn gilding of his cross and his moth-eaten white woolen miter; the women belonging to the sisterhood weeping for pity, while the banner-bearers whispered one to the other, "A flock of lean starlings!" In fact it had come at last to such a pass that the unfortunate White Fathers were debating among themselves whether they would not do better to disperse and seek each a separate pasture.

On a certain day, while this grave question was being discussed in the chapter, it was announced that Brother Gaucher requested to be heard in the council. This Brother Gaucher, I must explain, was the neat-herd of the monastery—that is to say, he passed his time moving from gallery to gallery with two emaciated cows in search of the grass

growing between the bricks. Brought up by an old woman of Beaux, and received into the monastery at the age of twelve years, he had had little opportunity to acquire any other learning than how to drive his cows and recite his Paternoster; and this last he did in Provençal, for he had as keen a head and sharp a wit as a leaden dagger. A zealous Christian, although a trifle visionary, at home in his hair-cloth, and administering discipline to himself with a robust conviction and good arms.

When they saw him enter the hall of the chapter, simple and uncouth, genuflecting to salute the assembly, they all—prior, canons, and treasurer—began to laugh. He was used to producing this effect, with his simpleton face, staring eyes, and goatee: therefore, he was not disconcerted.

"Your reverences," he said in his customary kindly manner, twisting his olive-nut rosary in his fingers, "it is a true saying that empty casks make the best music. By dint of digging into my hollow cranium I have found the way out of our troubles.

"You recollect Aunt Bégon, the good woman who brought me up —God rest her soul! She would sing queer songs when she had been drinking—well, reverend fathers, Aunt Bégon knew all the herbs in these mountains better than an old Corsican blackbird, and in the latter part of her life learned to make a wonderful elixir by mixing five or six simples which we would gather together in the mountains. That was a long while ago; but I believe, with the help of Saint Augustine and the

permission of our good father abbé, I shall be able to recall the ingredients of this wonderful elixir. We should then simply have to bottle and sell it for our community to grow rich like our brothers of La Trappe and La Grande——"

He was not allowed to finish. The prior sprang up and clasped him in his arms; the canons pressed his hands; the treasurer, even more deeply moved than the rest, kissed with reverence the torn fringe of his robe. Then all returned to their seats to deliberate, and before the meeting adjourned it was resolved by the chapter that the care of the cows should be transferred to Brother Thrasybule in order to permit Brother Gaucher to devote his whole time to concocting the elixir.

How the good brother succeeded at last in recovering Aunt Bégon's recipe—at the price of what labors and vigils—the chronicle does not record. What is certain is that at the end of six months the elixir of the White Fathers had already won a considerable reputation. Through all the neighboring country of Arles there was not a farm-house but had stored away among the bottles of old wine and jars of olives a little clay flask sealed with the arms of Provence, with the trademark of a monk in ecstasy upon a silver label. Thanks to the popularity of this elixir, the Prémontrés rapidly grew rich. The Pacôme tower was rebuilt, the prior had a new miter, the church windows handsome new glasses, and one fine Easter day a whole company of bells began caracoling with all their might.

As for Brother Gaucher—the poor lay brother whose clownishness

had furnished subject of merriment for all the chapter—there was now no such person. There was the Reverend Father Gaucher, a man of great parts and learning, who lived withdrawn from the trivial occupations of the cloister, shut up in his distillery, while thirty monks scoured the mountains for the sweet-scented herbs. This distillery, which not even the prior had the right to enter, was an old abandoned chapel at the end of the canon's garden. The good fathers, in their simplicity, had invested the place with a strange and terrible mystery, and if perchance some over-bold and curious monk ventured so far as the door, he quickly drew back, terrified at the sight of Father Gaucher, with his wizard-like beard, bending over his furnaces with his hydrometer, and the red sandstone retorts, the gigantic alembics, the crystal serpentine stones, and all the numberless weird things that flamed up necromantically in the red light from the stained windows.

At sunset, when the last Angelus sounded, the door of this mysterious place would open softly, and the reverend father would wend his way to church for the evening office. What a reception he had in passing through the monastery! The brothers stood aside in rows to make way for him to pass, whispering together, "Hush-sh—he has a secret!" The treasurer followed, and conversed with him, his head bowed humbly. And in the midst of all this adulation, the father, with his broad-brimmed tricorn set back on his head like an aureole, as he wiped the drops from his brow, would look around with complaisance on the spacious courts planted with oranges; the blue roofs, with their

new weather-cocks; the monastery, sparkling white between elegant carved colonettes; and the monks, in their new vestments, filing tranquilly along two by two.

"It is to me they owe all this," said the reverend father to himself; and whenever the thought entered his mind his bosom swelled with pride.

You shall see how the poor man was punished.

One evening he arrived during the office, red and panting, his cowl all awry, and so confused that he dipped his sleeves in the holy water up to the elbows. At first it was thought his agitation was caused by his being late; but when they saw him bow low to the organ instead of the high altar, cross the church like a gust of wind and wander about the choir for five minutes unable to find his seat, and, when he was seated, bow to right and left in a beatified manner, murmurs of astonishment ran through the three naves. "What is the matter with Father Gaucher?" "What is the matter with Father Gaucher?" was whispered from breviary to breviary. Twice the prior, impatient, let fall his cross on the flagging to command silence. The chanting still went on in the choir, but the responses were faint.

Suddenly, in the midst of the *Ave Verum,* Father Gaucher leaned back in his stall and intoned in a thundering voice:

In Paris there's a White Father,
Patatan, patatan, taraban, taraban.

The consternation was universal. Every one rose. "Carry him out! he is possessed!" The monks crossed themselves; Monseigneur's cross fairly ran mad. But Father Gaucher saw and heard nothing, till at last two able-bodied monks were compelled to drag him out by the little door of the choir, writhing like one possessed of a devil, and continuing his "Patatan, patatan, taraban, taraban," at the top of his lungs.

The next morning at daybreak the poor man was on his knees in the prior's oratory making his confession with a river of tears. "It was the elixir, Monseigneur, the elixir surprised me," he said, beating his breast. And seeing the poor man so grieved and penitent, the good prior was deeply moved.

"Come, come, Father Gaucher, calm yourself. All this will pass away like dew in the sunshine. The song, it is true, was rather—ahem! It is to be hoped the novices didn't hear it. Tell us exactly how it happened. It was testing the elixir, was it not? Like Schwartz, the inventor of gunpowder, you are the victim of your invention. And listen, friend, is it absolutely indispensable that you should try this terrible elixir yourself?"

"Unfortunately, yes, Monseigneur, the gauge gives me the strength and quantity of the alcohol, but for the finish, the flavor, I can trust only my tongue."

"Ah! very well; but when you are compelled to taste the elixir do you find it good? Does it give you pleasure?"

"Alas! yes, Monseigneur," said the poor father, growing very red; "for two evenings I have discovered in it a relish, an aroma—surely the devil himself must have played me this trick. But I am resolved hereafter to use only the gauge, so much the worse if the liquor is less exquisite—"

"No, no, that is not to be thought of," interrupted the prior; "we must run no risk of displeasing our customers. Now that you are forewarned, all you want is to be on your guard. Let us see—how much do you require in making your tests? Fifteen drops? twenty?—say twenty drops; the devil will be very sharp indeed if he catches you with twenty drops. Moreover, to provide against accident, you are henceforth dispensed from attending church; you will say the evening office in the distillery. And now go in peace, and remember to count carefully your drops."

But alas! it was to no purpose that the poor father counted his drops. The devil had him and would not let him go.

Strange offices were they that the distillery heard!

During the day all went well. The father, calm and collected, prepared his chafing-dishes and alembics, sorted carefully his herbs—all Provençal herbs, fine gray, dentated, penetrated with perfume and sunshine. But in the evening, when the simples were infused and the elixir cooling in the large copper basins—then it was that the poor man's torments began.

The drops fell from the tube into the ruddy goblet—seventeen—

eighteen—nineteen—twenty. These twenty drops the father swallowed at a draught, and experienced little or no pleasure in them; it was only the twenty-first that excited his craving. Oh! that twenty-first drop! Flying from the temptation he rushed to the farthest end of the laboratory, fell on his knees, and plunged into his Paternosters. But from the still steaming liquor arose a vapor charged with aromatics that came over and hovered about him, and in spite of himself, drew him back to the basins. Bending with dilated nostrils over the beautiful golden-green liquid, the father touched it gently with his tube, and in the little sparkling spangles of the emerald stream fancied he saw Aunt Bégon's eyes laughing and glittering at him.

"Come! just one more drop!" And drop by drop the poor man ended by filling his goblet to the brim, and then, quite faint, sank into an arm-chair and sipped his sin, repeating to himself with delicious remorse, "Ah! I am damning myself—damning myself!" The most dreadful of all was that at the bottom of this diabolical elixir, by some strange sorcery, he found all Aunt Bégon's wicked old songs:

Three little gadabouts were holding a feast,

or:

Maître André's shepherdess went off into the woods,

and always the famous "White Fathers," and the refrain, *Patatan, patatan, taraban, taraban.*



Fancy his confusion when, from the neighboring cells, they came to him next morning, and said, maliciously,

"Hé! hé! Father Gaucher, the cicadas must have got into your head when you went to bed last night."

Then followed tears and despair, and fasting and hair-cloth and penance; but they had no power against the demon of the elixir.

Meanwhile benedictions showered themselves upon the abbey in the form of orders. They came from Nîmes, Aix, Avignon, and Marseilles. Every day the monastery assumed more and more the appearance of a manufactory. There were the brothers for packing, brothers for docketing, brothers for sorting, and brothers for carting. There was less ringing of bells, but the country people around lost nothing, you may rest assured.

But one Sunday morning while the treasurer was reading in a full meeting of the chapter his report for the end of the year, and the good canons were listening to him with glistening eyes and a smile on their lips, Father Gaucher suddenly rushed into the midst of the conference.

'It is all over; I can do no more. Give me back my cows."

"What is the matter, Father Gaucher?" asked the prior, with a secret misgiving of what the matter was.

"The matter, Monseigneur? The matter is that I am preparing for myself an eternity of flames and pitchforks. The matter is that I drink and drink like any wretch—"

"But I told you to count your drops."

"Àh, yes! count my drops, but it is by goblets I count now. Yes, reverend father, I have come to this—three bottles an evening. You understand that this cannot go on. Have the elixir made by whom you will, may the fire of hell take me if I meddle with it again!"

There was no smiling in the chapter now. "But, unfortunate man, you would ruin us!" exclaimed the treasurer.

"Would you sooner have me damn myself?" Then the prior rose.

"Reverend brothers," he said, extending his white hand on which the pastoral ring glistened, "all this can be arranged. It is in the evening, is it not, my son, that the devil tempts you?"

"Yes, Monseigneur prior, regularly every evening. When night draws on I begin to feel—saving your presence—like Capitou's ass at sight of the pack-saddle."

"Well, reassure yourself. Henceforth every evening at the office we will say on your behalf the orison of Saint Augustine, to which plenary indulgence is attached. It will be absolution in the midst of the sin."

"Thank you! oh, thank you, Monseigneur prior." And Father Gaucher returned to his alembics as light as a lark.

And, in fact, from this day the officiating priest never failed to add, every evening, at the close of the office, "Let us pray for our poor brother Gaucher, who imperils his soul in the interests of the order. *Oremus Domine—*"

And while all the white cowls were prostrating themselves in the shadows of the naves at the other end of the monastery, behind the

flaming windows of the distillery, Father Gaucher could have been heard singing,

In Paris there's a White Father,
Patatan, patatan, taraban, taraban,
Who makes the little nuns dance,
Tra la la, tra la la, in a garden,
Who makes the little nuns—

Here the good father stopped short in terror. "Mercy! what if my parishioners should hear me!"